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SIX MONTHS ON THE ITALIAN FRONT

From the Stelvio to the Adriatic

1915—1916

By

Julius M. Price

War-Artist Correspondent of the "Illustrated London News"

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE
1917

D
569
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P7
1917a

R01138 02161

395127
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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
411A HARROW ROAD
LONDON W.

To the Italian Military Authorities

in recognition of the courtesy and many kindnesses extended to me during my six months' work with the glorious Army of Italy.

NOTE

I am indebted to the Directors of the *Illustrated London News* for their kind permission to reproduce in this book the sketches and drawings I made for them whilst on the Italian Front, a great many of which have already been published.

PREFACE

AS the reader will discover for himself, I have no pretensions to pose as a Military Expert. This book is the result of a few hasty impressions gathered over a period which, with all its minor inconveniences and little daily worries, I look back upon as among the happiest and best filled of a somewhat varied career. I have not yielded to the temptation to be interesting at the expense of veracity; to that fact the indulgent reader will, I trust, attribute many of the dull pages. If in the latter half of the book I have laid particular stress on the operations leading up to and culminating in the capture of Gorizia, I hope I may be forgiven, as I had the good luck to be the only foreign correspondent on the spot at these scenes of History-making. In my dedication I have paid a humble tribute to the many kindnesses I received at the hands of the Military Authorities, from His Excellency General Cadorna downwards. I can only repeat it here.

JULIUS M. PRICE.

21, Golden Square,
London, W.

January, 1917.

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CHAPTER I

GERRARD 2575 ? "

" Hello—Hello ! "

" That you, Julius Price ? Charles Ingram speaking—When are you starting for Italy ? "

I had only received my marching orders from the office the previous day, so the thought came to my mind " Early next week," but I hadn't the pluck to give expression to it. Instead, I compromised lamely with " As soon as possible."

" Rubbish ! " snapped the voice, " Get off at once."

I had known my Charles Ingram—best of chiefs and most loyal of friends—too long to attempt to argue. I had started on too many journeys for *The Illustrated London News* not to realize that a War-artist must have no collars to buy—no friends to bid farewell to—so there was only one stereotyped answer possible—" All right, I'll leave to-morrow morning."

" Well, good-bye and good luck to you."

8.30 the following morning therefore saw me at Charing Cross, duly passported and baggaged, bound for Rome.

Although Italy had not yet officially declared her intention of joining in with the Allies, it was well known that it was but a matter of a few days before she would do so. The War fever all over Italy was at its height, and there seemed no possibility of anything occurring to influence adversely the decision of the King. The sands of time were rapidly running out, while Count Berchtold, the Austrian Chancellor, was deliberately—for the Allies, fortunately—playing with the destiny of his nation.

The centre of interest at the moment was obviously the Capital, so I was anxious to reach it in time to witness the historic scenes of the near future. Rumour had it that so eager was the nation to get to grips with its hereditary foe that a revolution would ensue were the King to hesitate as to his course of action, while it had been an open secret for some weeks that a general mobilisation of the Army and Navy had been in active progress since the commencement of the period of tension. Italy, therefore, was the *point de mire* of the entire world on the 20th of May, 1915, when I left London, and I could congratulate myself that, thanks to the journalistic *flair* of Charles Ingram, I should be on the spot in time for anything that might happen.

At that date one was still able to reach Paris via Folkestone and Boulogne—England was only just awakening to the fact she was at war—the popular short sea-passage route had not yet been taken over by the military authorities, and although the examination of passports and passengers was severe there was nothing like the difficulty and delay one now experiences in getting across the Channel. The scheduled time from London to Paris was a mere matter of twelve hours, which, of course, was not excessively long under the circumstances, while as compared with the time the journey occupies to-day via Southampton and Havre, it was rapidity itself.

It had been a bit of a rush to get through all I had to do in the twenty-four hours I had at my disposal before leaving London. Consuls will not be hurried even for War-Correspondents, and one's passport nowadays is far and away the most important article of one's belongings. There are, moreover, always a hundred and one things that must be done before starting on an expedition of indefinite duration. I know of nothing more irritating when "on the

road " than suddenly to discover you have forgotten to bring with you some insignificant but invaluable object which can be easily procured in London but which is unobtainable abroad.

In common with most Correspondents, I have always made it a habit to have my kit kept more or less packed ready for emergency, but not to the extent of one of the brotherhood, who, in order to obviate the danger of finding something missing from his trunks while on the war-path, had lists of the various items pasted in the lid of each trunk which he would carefully verify before starting. An excellent idea, and even amusing in places, as on the occasion when his old soldier-servant had described one of the important items in the list, " False tooth (Supernumerary)."

That the selection of every detail of one's baggage when travelling " light " is an all important matter is incontrovertible, but personal experience and individual fancy can be the only guide to what one is likely really to want on a hazardous journey. For myself, I have contrived to sort things down to an irreducible minimum, which will go in a car or the luggage rack of a railway carriage. This, together with a small attaché case for my books, papers and spare pipes, constitutes my entire baggage, of which I never lose sight.

Two pals came to see me off, and one, a connoisseur in these matters, brought me a box of his choicest Havanas to smoke *en route*, and delighted though I was at his kind thought, I felt I was going to have trouble with this unexpected addition to my luggage. And it started when I found that my bags were so full up that I could find no immediate home for a box of 100 big cigars, much as I could appreciate them. I could not help feeling that had my friend given me a leg of mutton to carry to Rome it would have been a less awkward parting gift.

The trouble I had with those cigars makes me smile even now when I think of it—they seemed to get everywhere—rather than carry the box, I endeavoured to distribute them in various pockets—with the result that I was simply overwhelmed with Corona Coronas, and although I smoked hard all the way it seemed to make no impression on the supply, and the thought of what might happen at the Italian frontier became a positive obsession.

I had already spent six months on the French front, so was pretty familiar with the warlike scenes that presented themselves on the other side of the Channel, but to most of my fellow travellers they were quite new.

Several well intentioned ladies in the train from Boulogne to Paris had provided themselves with big supplies of "Woodbines," and all the way to Etaples, whenever we passed soldiers along the line, they were busy throwing the small packets of cigarettes out of the windows to English and French indiscriminately.

It was Voltaire, I believe, who asserted that England has sixty religious sects but only one sauce. I fancy that the French "Poilu" would now substitute "cigarette" for "sauce," but whether they prefer the "one and only" to their more robust "Caporals" is a matter of doubt. For my own part, I was too busy that day getting through with my Coronas to trouble much about either.

I should have liked to have spent a few hours in dear old Paris, but the exigency of the situation in Italy did not permit me to entertain the idea for a moment. I just had sufficient time to drive to the Gare de Lyon, dine at a restaurant near the Station, and catch the Rome express.

The train was not crowded, and the journey till we reached Turin was quite featureless with the

exception, as far as I could judge, that everyone was discussing the situation in Italy.

At the frontier station of Modane, where the examination of luggage was quite perfunctory, some important news had just come through. The Parliament, on reassembling, had given to the Salandra Cabinet by an overwhelming majority a vote of confidence, which amounted to a declaration of war against Austria.

At Turin, where we arrived in the afternoon, the station was buzzing with rumours that war had already been declared—this, as it turned out, was not the case, but it showed how acute was the crisis and the excited state of popular opinion.

This was borne strongly upon me by a curious order given to the passengers on the train leaving Turin. In broad daylight all blinds had to be drawn down and kept down till we had passed a certain station further on. The reason for this did not transpire, but it was rigorously enforced.

It was a typical Italian summer afternoon, so the discomfort thus entailed in the stuffy carriages may be better imagined than described ; but it brought home to you the seriousness of the situation and the fact that whatever the outcome the Government was taking no chances. What was happening in the district through which we were passing was none of our business, and they let us know it—thus.

This was actually the first indication of the nearness of war, and also an illuminating insight of the " method " and prescience of the war department. What struck you everywhere was the small number of soldiers one saw, and you could but conclude that if movement of troops were taking place they were perhaps being carried out in the zone where the blinds had to be drawn, though Turin was so far from any prospective front that this seemed an excessive precaution.

Rome, if not exactly deserted, was much emptier than usual for the time of year ; but as it was 84° in the shade that may have had something to do with it.

At the Grand Hotel, where I proposed staying, all the upper floors were closed.

The white waistcoated manager showed me a fine room on the second floor, and on my enquiring the price, asked me, as I thought with diffidence, whether I thought six lires a day was too much. As I knew the charge in normal times would not have been less than three times that amount, I told him I did not—and took it.

A stroll through the principal streets in the cool of the evening, when one might have expected some indication of popular feeling, revealed absolutely no sign of anything abnormal. It was outwardly the Rome of peace times, not as you would have expected to find it on the eve of war ; yet the Press was full of the gravity of the impending crisis, and in the Capital, as on the journey towards it, one was struck by the remarkable absence of soldiers everywhere.

The following day, Sunday, the 23rd of May, it was evident from the tenor of the morning papers that the *ultima ratio* was in sight, and that it was now only a question of hours, or even minutes, when the momentous decision of the King would be announced. There was a significant calm everywhere that one could not fail to notice, though nobody appeared to have any doubt as to what was pending.

Strangely enough all the old characteristics of the Latin race seem to be dying out—the excitability, the hotheadedness, the volubility of the Italian of the days of yore are no longer *en evidence*. The men of Italy of to-day are of a different fibre, and though the old-time mettle remains, it is shown differently.

There is a growing tendency amongst all classes towards the imperturbability and placidity one associates with Northern races. Events are accepted more dispassionately, and there is far less of the garrulity and dramatic gesture of twenty years ago.

As was generally anticipated, the fateful decision was made known towards evening, and the papers appeared announcing the declaration of war, and that Baron von Macchio, the Austrian Ambassador, had been handed his passports at 3.30.

Even then, when one would have expected the pent up feelings of the people to display themselves in some form of demonstration, there was no commotion whatever.

Along the Corso Umberto the gaily-dressed crowds strolled as leisurely as ever, and the laughter and merriment were the same as on any ordinary Sunday evening. There were perhaps more people about than usual, but this was probably because it was a delightfully cool evening after an exceptionally hot day.

The Café Aragno, which is the hub of the political, journalistic and social life of the Capital, was, of course, packed, as it always is on Sundays. Groups of people were standing about in the roadway and on the pavement reading and discussing the news. " Extra Special " Editions of the evening papers, with fresh details of the situation, seemed to be coming out every few minutes, and the paper boys did a big trade.

If, however, I had not seen it for myself I should never have believed that such composure in such exceptional circumstances could be possible. I could not help contrasting in my mind this quite remarkable absence of excitability in Rome with what I had seen in Paris on the first day of the mobilisation. When the streets resounded to the cheers of the Reservists and everywhere was wild excitement.

It may have been that the event had been so long anticipated in Italy that when the actual moment arrived its effect was discounted ; but nevertheless stoicism of this remarkable character certainly struck one as being quite an unexpected trait of the national temperament.

I was, I must admit, the more surprised and disappointed, as my instructions from my Editor were to get to Rome as quickly as possible and make sketches of the scenes that would doubtless be witnessed in the streets as soon as war was declared, but there was no more to sketch in Rome on that Sunday evening than one would see any day in London, and there were certainly far fewer soldiers about.

In fact, it is probably no exaggeration to state that it was with a sigh of relief that the Italians learned that hostilities were about to commence against Austria.

" The Day " that had been looked forward to for forty-nine years, since peace was forced upon Italy by Prussia and Austria in 1866 after the Battle of Sadowa, had at last come, and found the nation united in its determination to endure anything and stand any sacrifice in its resolve to conquer its hereditary foe once and for all.

The absence of outward sign of feeling amongst the populace was as much marked in the days following the declaration of hostilities. The object of the war was well understood, and therefore popular with all classes—in the Capital at any rate, and there was in consequence no flurry or appearance of undue restlessness anywhere—business went on as usual, and except for the shouting of the newsboys, one could scarcely have known that war had commenced.

All this was, of course, due to the fact that the general mobilisation had been gradually and quietly

During the entire day the onward march continued (*see page* 37)

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taking place for some time previously. There were therefore none of the heartrending scenes such as one witnessed in the streets and round the railway stations in Paris after the first flush of excitement had worn off, for most of the Reservists were well on the way to the Frontier by the time war was declared.

It was a veritable triumph of organisation, and reflected the greatest credit on all concerned.

I had occasion to go to the War Office several times, and found an air of solid business on all sides that was very impressive. Everything appeared to be going on as though by clockwork—a wonderful testimony to the efficiency of the different departments. There was not the slightest indication that anything had been left to chance or to luck in "muddling through somehow."

Of course it is incontrovertible that those in charge of the destinies of the nation had had ample time to get ready and to profit by the lessons of the war elsewhere, but this does not alter the fact that it was only the wonderful state of preparedness in Italy that enabled her to take the initiative directly war was declared. It certainly revealed an intuitive power of grasping the exigencies of the situation on the part of the Chiefs of the War department that to my mind presaged victory from the outset.

CHAPTER II

MY credentials—The War Zone—Italy's preparedness—The Press Censorship—General Elia's advice—Disappointment—A pipe in the Pincio—An inspiration—I leave for Venice — Venice in war time — The lonely pigeons of the Place St. Marc—The Doge's Palace —The bronze horses—Interior of St. Marc, strange spectacle—First act of war between Italy and Austria—Aeroplane bombs Venice—French aviators—Treasures of Venice—Everyday life in Venice during daytime—After nightfall—On the *qui vive*—Extraordinary precautions—Dangers of the streets —Spy fever—*Permis de séjour*—The angry crowd —Defences against air attacks—Venice not a *place forte*—Nearest point of the Front—The British Vice-Consul, Mr. Beak—A good Samaritan—The letter of credentials—The Commandant of Venice —More advice—New Rescript of the Generalissimo —Reference to Correspondents—Decide attempt go to Udine—The language difficulty—The waiter at the Hotel Danielli—His offer to accompany me—Make arrangements at once—Introduced to Peppino Garibaldi—Amusing incident.

CHAPTER II

I ARRIVED in Rome armed with sufficient credentials and recommendations, apparently, to frank me through every barrier to the Front, but I was not long discovering that in spite of the courtesy with which I was received by the officials to whom I had introductions, it was hopeless to expect any relaxation, for the time being, of the stringent decree with regard to the War Correspondents that had been issued by the Generalissimo.

A " War Zone " was declared at once, and the most rigorous precautions taken to insure its being guarded against intrusion. Within its confines were several important cities, as for instance, Brescia, Venice, Verona, Vicenza, Belluno, Bologna, Padua and Udine and the entire area was considered as in a state of war, and immediately placed under what was practically martial law. No railway tickets were obtainable unless one had a permit to travel on the line.

It is of interest to mention all these conditions ruling at the very beginning of the war as affording an object lesson in the " method " and foresight which were displayed in every move of General Cadorna even to the smallest details.

Italy took a long while making up her mind to throw in her lot with the Allies, but there was no losing time once she made a start, as was soon proved, and her preparedness was evidenced in every direction.

A censorship of the most drastic character was established at once, and it looked at one time as if correspondents were going to have a bad time of it, and see even less, if possible, than in the other areas of the war.

" Go and make a journey through Italy ; there is lots to see that will interest you as an artist, and come back in about three months from now ; then perhaps some arrangements will have been made with reference to correspondents going to the Front." This was all I could get from General Elia, the genial Under-Secretary of State for War, who speaks English fluently—when at last, through the kindly intervention of the British Embassy I managed to see him and begged to be permitted to accompany the troops.

This could scarcely be construed as encouraging, and as I came away from the interview I must admit I felt the reverse of elated. I had already spent a week trying to get permission to go to the Front, and I certainly had not the slightest intention of playing the " tourist " for the next few months, nor of idling away my time in Rome if I could help it. But what was to be done ?

I could hardly speak a word of Italian, so knew I was handicapped terribly for getting about alone. I strolled up to the solitude of the Pincio, and lighting my pipe, sat down under the trees to think it out. I forgot to mention that the decree placing Venice and other towns within the War Zone was not to come into force for another twenty-four hours.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me. I knew Venice well, why not go there ; at any rate I should be quite near the Front, and with luck I might manage to make my way there. Anyhow it could not fail to be more interesting so close to the scene of operations than in Rome.

I made up my mind to start that day if possible, and, going to Cooks' office near the hotel, found that I was in luck's way—there was a train that afternoon, and there was not the least difficulty in getting a ticket, but this was the last opportunity of doing so without a permit, I was told.

The next day therefore saw me in Venice and amidst familiar scenes. But it was a very altered place from the Venice of peace time. It looked very dreary and lifeless. The week that had elapsed since the commencement of hostilities had brought about a great change.

There were no visitors left—only one hotel was open, Danielli's—the Grand having been taken over by the Red Cross Society ; the canals, those delightful arteries of Venetain life, appeared almost deserted, although the steam launches were running as usual ; the pigeons had the place St. Marc practically to themselves, workmen were busy removing the glorious windows from the Doge's Palace and bricking up the supporting arches.

The chapel at the base of the Campanile was shrouded in thick brickwork ; the famous bronze horses on the portico of St. Marc had been taken down at once ; the interior of the church itself presented a curious spectacle, as it had several feet of sand on the floor, and was hidden by a big bastion of sandbags.

It is perhaps of interest to mention that the first act of war between Austria and Italy took place at Venice. At 3.30 on the morning of the 24th May the inhabitants were aroused by the loud boom of a signal gun—this was immediately followed by the screech of all the steam whistles in the City and on the boats.

In a very few minutes the batteries of the Aerial-Guard Station and machine guns and rifles were firing as rapidly as they could at the intruders—several taubes flying at a great height—without effect, unfortunately, as they managed to drop several bombs and get away unscathed. Two of the bombs fell in the courtyard of the Colonna di Castelpo, one in the Tana near the Rio della Tana, another in the San Lucia, and a fourth in the Rio del Carmini.

It was said that an enormous parachute, to which

was suspended incandescent matter to light up the ground, was released from one of the aeroplanes, but this was not corroborated ; it is certain though that the bomb that fell in San Lucia was incendiary and spread lighted petroleum, without effect happily. Austria, therefore, lost no time in beginning her war of vandalism.

Every precaution possible was being adopted while I was there, to protect the city against any further aeroplane attacks, and there was a contingent of French aviators—amongst whom was Beaumont—staying at the hotel, who were constantly patrolling over the city.

Unfortunately, in a place like Venice, which is such a veritable conglomeration of artistic treasures, it is obviously very difficult to protect all, and with a thoroughly ruthless and barbaric enemy like Austria it is to be feared that a lot of irreparable damage will be done before the end of the war.

Life in Venice during the daytime was practically normal—sunshine engenders confidence ; it was after nightfall that you realised the high state of tension in which everyone was living ; it could scarcely be described as terror, but a "nervy," "jumpy" condition, which was very uncanny. Everyone seemed to be on the *qui vive*, though curiously enough the fear of the Venetians, as far as I could judge, was not so much for themselves as for the safety of their beloved city.

The most extraordinary precautions were taken to ensure its being shrouded in impenetrable obscurity at night—a ray of light shewing through a window meant instant arrest for the occupant of the room. Even smoking out of doors at night was strictly forbidden. The doorways of restaurants, cafés, and shops were heavily draped with double curtains, and after eight o'clock the electric light was turned off and only candles allowed.

It would be difficult to describe the weird effect of Venice in total darkness on a moonless night.

It is said that more people have lost their lives by falling into the canals than through aeroplane bombs, and I can quite believe it, for it was positively dangerous to go a yard unless one was absolutely certain of one's whereabouts.

Added to this was the risk of being mistaken for a spy. One had to get a *permis de séjour* from the Police, but even with this in your pocket one was never really safe, for they had " spy fever " very badly indeed when I was there, and even old and well-known inhabitants were not immune from suspicion at times.

I heard of several cases of hair-breadth escapes from the clutches of the angry crowd which would gather on the slightest suggestion. To be heard speaking with a foreign accent was often sufficient to attract unpleasant attention, so you were inclined to be chary of venturing far from the Place St. Marc at any time, however much your papers might be *en règle*.

Apart from the defensive work that was being undertaken to protect Venice from Austrian air attacks, there was nothing of interest in the way of military or naval activity to be seen. Destroyers and torpedo boats occasionally came into the lagoon, but seldom remained long.

The position of Venice makes it a sort of cul de sac, and of no importance whatever from the point of view of land and sea operations, and it is quite at the mercy of Austrian aeroplanes or seaplanes operating from Pola or Trieste.

The sole object the Austrians can have in attacking it therefore is to cause wanton damage to its historic buildings and art treasures, for it is not a *place forte* in any sense of the word ; and if there is one thing more than another calculated to stiffen

the backs of the Italians against their enemy and to make them the more determined to do all in their power to crush Austria for ever, it is this cold-blooded onslaught on their national artistic heir-looms, for which there is no military justification whatever.

At that time the nearest point of the Front was some 40 miles from Venice, in Friuli, and after a few days marking time, I decided that this was where I must make for if I wanted to see anything of what was going on in this early stage of the war.

The courteous and genial British Vice-Consul, Mr. Beak, who had just taken over the post, proved a veritable good Samaritan, and did his best to help me.

I have not mentioned, I think, that when in Rome I had been given an important letter of credentials by the British Embassy recommending me for any facilities the Italian military authorities might be prepared to grant me, and the letter now proved invaluable. Mr. Beak got a translation made of it, to which he affixed the consular stamp, and, armed with this, I paid a visit to the Commandant of Venice, at the Arsenal.

He received me with the utmost cordiality, but when I suggested his giving me permission to go to the Front he informed me that he had no power to do this ; that my best plan would be to go direct to Headquarters at Udine, where doubtless I would get what I wanted on the strength of my letter from the Embassy. I said nothing, but with the recollection of what General Elia had told me in Rome, I had my doubts. Anyhow, it gave me the idea of going to Udine and trying my luck ; if the worst came to the worst, I could but be sent back, and in the meantime I should have seen something of the Front.

The following day a new rescript of the Generalissimo appeared in the papers to the effect that until

further orders no correspondents were allowed in the War Zone. This was awkward for me, as, of course, I was already in it, but I made up my mind to run the further risk of getting up to the actual Front if it were possible. But how, without speaking Italian, for, of course, the " interpreter " element had disappeared from Venice since there were no longer any tourists to interpret for.

My ever faithful pipe as usual helped me to solve the difficulty (what I owe to Lady Nicotine for ideas evolved under her sway I can never be sufficiently grateful for).

There was a very intelligent young waiter at the hotel who spoke English fluently, and it occurred to me that he would make a useful guide if he would go with me. He not only jumped at the idea, but actually offered to come for a few days for nothing if he could get permission from the manager, and if I paid his expenses, so anxious was he to see something of the military operations.

There was no difficulty in getting the consent of the manager as the hotel was practically empty ; and then my friend, the Vice-Consul, again good-naturedly came to my assistance by giving me a letter to the Military Commandant of Udine, in which he stated fully my object in coming to the front, and the fact that I was carrying a special letter of credentials from the Embassy.

These two important documents, together with my passport, were, I felt, sufficient to frank me some distance unless unforseen trouble arose ; so I made arrangements to start at once ; and in order not to be hampered with baggage, as I did not know where my venture would take me, decided to leave my bulky luggage behind at the hotel, only taking with me what I could carry on my back in my " ruksak."

Before I left I was introduced to a very nice

fellow who had just arrived in Venice, and a somewhat amusing incident occurred. I did not catch his name at first, and, as he spoke English so fluently and looked so much like an Englishman, I was somehow under the impression that he was a correspondent of a London paper. He appeared mystified when, after a few casual remarks, I asked him how long he had been in Italy.

"How long?" he exclaimed. "Why, I live here." "But you are not an Italian?" "Well, you see my grandfather was," he replied with a touch of humour which I was only able to appreciate, when I heard later that my "English journalist" was Peppino Garibaldi, a nephew of the great patriot. He had just come from the Front, where he had been to see the King to offer his services in raising a regiment of volunteers similar to the one he had recently commanded on the French front in the Argonne. His offer, it appeared, was not accepted, but afterwards I learned he was given a commission in the Army, and he has since so distinguished himself in action that he has risen to the rank of Colonel. I believe his brothers have also done equally well in the Army, thus proving that they are all real "chips of the old block."

CHAPTER III

FROM Venice to Udine—Reservists rejoining—Interesting crowd—Delays en route—Endless procession of military trains—Drawn blinds—The Red Cross train—Arrival Udine—Scene on platform—In search of an hotel—A little incident—The well-dressed civilian—The obliging guide—My suspicions—Awkward questions—The best hotel in Udine—A little "Trattoria" close by—A cheap room—First impressions of Udine—At the Police Office—The *permis de séjour*—The *Carabinieri* and the local police—The fascination of the big guns—The "Military Commandant of Udine"—A difficult proposition—The luck of the undelivered letter—My guide has to leave me—I change my quarters—The Hotel "Tower of London"—Alone in Udine—An awkward predicament—A friend in need—Still more luck—Dr. Berthod—I am offered a studio—I accept—The delight of having this studio in Udine.

CHAPTER III

THE train service between Venice and Udine was apparently running as usual, and there was no difficulty in getting tickets in spite of the drastic regulations with regard to passengers. Possibly it was assumed that anyone already inside the War Zone had permission to be there, so no further questions were asked.

My guide, of course, got the tickets, so I had no trouble in that matter ; perhaps if I had gone to the booking office myself with my limited vocabulary of Italian it would have been different. As it was, it all seemed ridiculously simple, and there appeared to be no difficulty whatever.

In Venice they are so accustomed to Englishmen, and artists are such " common objects of the sea-shore," that I attracted no particular notice, in spite of my rucksack and my Norfolk jacket, breeches and leggings.

The train left Venice at 8 o'clock in the morning, and was crowded with officers in uniform and reservists in civilian attire, going to join their regiments. Every class of Italian life was to be seen amongst them—from the peasant with his humble belongings in a paper parcel to the smart young man from Venice with his up-to-date suit case and other luggage.

All were in the highest possible spirits, and it gave me more the impression of a holiday outing of some big manufacturing company than a troop-train as it virtually was.

I now began to realize how handicapped I was in not speaking Italian ; it would have been so interesting to have been able to chat with these enthusiastic young fellows.

It was supposed to take three hours to get to Udine, but we were two hours and a half longer, as we were continually being held up for trains with troops, artillery and every description of *materiel* to pass. It was an endless procession, and the soldiers in them seemed as happy as sand-boys, and cheered lustily as they passed us.

The blinds of our windows and doors had to be kept drawn down the whole way, and no one except the officers was allowed to get out of the train at the stations under any pretext. Still there was not much that we did not see ; the blinds did not fit so tight as all that.

At one place we passed a long Red Cross train full of badly wounded men just in from the Front. This was the first time there had been any evidence of the fighting that was taking place on ahead. It was almost a startling sight, and came in sharp contrast to the cheering crowds of healthy boys in the troop trains that had gone by a few minutes previously.

There was a big crowd of officers and soldiers on the platform at Udine, which was the terminus of the line, and one realised at once that it was an important military centre. Outside was a large assemblage of vehicles, motor-waggons, and ambulance cars, and altogether there was a scene of military activity that presented a sharp contrast to sleepy Venice.

The station is some little distance from the town, so we set off in search of a small hotel we had been recommended to where we could get quiet lodgings for a day or two as I did not want to put up anywhere where we should attract undue attention. I had thought it would be advisable to drop the " War Correspondent " for the time being and to call myself simply a wandering artist in search of Military subjects, and my intelligent young guide quite

Rugged and threatening, visible for miles around is the frowning pinnacle of bare rock known as Monte Nero (*see page* 40)

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entered into my idea—it was only a harmless little fib after all.

A few hundred yards from the station a little incident occurred which, curiously enough, turned out to be the commencement of the run of luck which, with one exception, of which I shall tell later, I had during the whole of my stay in Udine. It came about in this wise.

A good-looking, well-dressed man in civilian attire caught us up as we were walking along, and, noticing that we seemed uncertain which way to take, asked pleasantly if we were looking for any particular street. My companion unhesitatingly told him we had just arrived in Udine, and were looking for lodgings.

The stranger, noticing I could not speak Italian, addressed me in a very good French, and obligingly offered to accompany us part of the way. I could not well refuse, but I recollect how the thought instantly flashed through my mind that he was perhaps a police official in mufti or a detective, and my suspicions seemed to be confirmed by a question he put to me bluntly.

" Are you journalists ? " he enquired suddenly.

My first impulse was to ask what business it was of his what we were, when it flashed through my mind that it was better not to resent his query, which might after all mean no harm. So I replied that I was a travelling artist in search of military subjects, and that my companion was my interpreter. " But why do you ask if we are journalists ? " I continued.

" Because journalists are forbidden to come to Udine, and only yesterday the famous Barzini himself was arrested and sent back to Milan for coming here without permission. Of course there may be no objection to you as an artist if all your papers are in order."

I assured him they were, but nevertheless I did not feel very reassured after what he had told me; it seemed a sort of hint that unless I was very sure of my position I had better not think of taking lodgings at Udine, otherwise I was asking for trouble. However, I had weighed all this in my mind beforehand, and was well aware of the risk I was taking.

It makes me smile even now when I recall how curtly I answered him, and how every remark he made only increased my early doubts as to his bona-fides, for he turned out to be as good and genuine a fellow as I ever met, and had it not been for this chance meeting, my early impressions of Udine would have been very different to what they were, apart from the result it had on my work whilst there, but of all this more anon.

The modest hotel we had been recommended to put up at was merely modest in comparison with Danielli's at Venice, for it was the Hotel d'Italie, one of the best and most frequented in Udine, and the very last place I should have chosen for seclusion. As it turned out, they had not a room vacant, so we had perforce to seek accommodation elsewhere.

Meanwhile the obliging stranger had left us to our own devices, much to my relief, as I was not over keen on his knowing where we put up.

There happened to be a little "trattoria" close by, and we went in to get something to eat. It was late for lunch, so we had it to ourselves, and the proprietor, seeing we were strangers, came and had a chat with us.

It turned out that he had a room to let for 1.50 per night with two beds in it; it was large and very clean, so, to avoid walking about trying to find something better, I told him that I would take it. But it was more easily said than done.

"You must go to the Questura (the police) and

get their permission to stay in Udine before I can let you have it," he told us. This was a bit awkward, but there was no help for it but to go at once and get the ordeal over, so we made our way at once to the police-station.

We had to pass through a main street, and I realised at once that Udine, although the " Front " and the Headquarters of the Army, was only a small Italian garrison town, with perhaps more soldiers about than there would have been in normal times.

Considering how close it was at that moment to the actual opening operations of the war, it was distinctly disappointing from my point of view, considering I was looking for military subjects. In this respect it was even less interesting than many of the French towns such as, for instance, Epinal or Langres, I had been in during the early days shortly after the commencement of hostilities.

This was my first impression of Udine—I had reason to modify it considerably in a very short time, in fact during the first day I was there. The echo of the big guns convinced me that although life in Udine was outwardly normal, the war was very near indeed.

At the Questura, to my surprise, the Commissaire made but little difficulty in giving me a *permis de séjour*, on seeing my passport and my last *permis* from Venice, and on my guide explaining that I might be remaining some little time, he readily made it out for one month.

As I came away I could not help wondering why it should have been so easy for me to obtain this permission to remain in Udine when Barzini had been arrested and sent away a couple of days previously.

I had yet to learn that in the War Zone the civil authorities and the local police take a very back seat,

and that the *permis de séjour* I had just been given would prove of no value whatever if the Carabinieri —*i.e.*, the military police—took exception to my being in Udine. Fortunately I did not learn this until some days later, and in the meantime, confident in the possession of my police permit, I had no hesitation in walking about the town freely.

The sound of the big guns, however, which one heard unceasingly, soon began to exercise the curious fascination over me that they always have, and I was not long making up my mind that I must lose no time in Udine.

It was a delightfully quaint old town, with cafés and restaurants, and altogether a pleasant place to spend a few days in, but this was not what I had come for. So I immediately set about making enquiries for the quarters of the "Military Commandant of Udine" in order to present my letter from the Consul, and ask for permission to go out to the scene of operations.

It seemed on the face of it a perfectly simple matter to find out where he was staying, but we spent several hours going from place to place without success.

The long official envelope with "On His Majesty's Service" on it proved an open sesame everywhere, and I was received with marked courtesy by all the staff officers I showed it to, and the envelope itself seemed to inspire respect, but not one of them could (or as I thought "would") give me the information of the Commandant's whereabouts. It struck me as being very strange all this mystery as it appeared.

Well, after having spent two hours going from one staff building to another, we had to give it up as a bad job—it was evidently a very difficult proposition to present a letter to the "Military Commandant of Udine"—and the envelope was beginning to show signs of wear after being handled

so much, so there was nothing for it but to have the letter always handy and chance coming across him sometime—in the meantime, if any questions were asked me as to the reason of my being in Udine I felt I had always the excuse of this document which I was waiting to hand personally to the " Military Commandant."

As it turned out I owed all my luck in remaining in Udine as long as I did to this undelivered letter in its official envelope. Whenever I was asked any awkward questions as to why I was there, out it would come, and the mere sight of it seemed to afford me protection. It was a veritable talisman. How its spell was eventually broken I will narrate in due course.

To get out to the scene of operations without a permit appeared hopeless, for the moment ; one realised it would take some time to work it, so the only thing to do was to chance it and to remain on in the hope of something turning up—that Udine was the place to stay in if one could was evident. I therefore decided not to budge till they turned me out, and I never had cause to regret my decision.

My guide had only been given a few days holiday, so when he saw that there was no immediate chance of getting out to see anything of the fighting he told me he thought he had better return to Venice.

This, of course, meant my remaining on alone—a somewhat dreary prospect, since I knew no one, and, as I said, could scarcely make myself understood, but there was no help for it.

Before he left I managed, with his assistance, to find a better room in a small hotel in the main street (curiously enough the hotel was named " The Tower of London "), and arranged to have my luggage sent from Venice.

It would be difficult to describe my feelings when I found myself alone outside the station after my

guide had gone. I felt literally stranded, but my lucky star was in the ascendant, and in a few minutes a little incident occurred that made me feel that I might get used to Udine after all.

There is a tramcar running from the station to the town, so I got on it as a sort of first attempt at finding my way about without assistance, but when the conductor apparently asked me where I wanted to go I was at once non-plussed, and could only gesticulate my ignorance and offer him a lire to take the fare out of.

I might have been in an awkward predicament and have attracted more attention than I desired, when a big stout man, who was also standing on the platform of the car, turned to me and in excellent English asked me where I was going and if he could be of any assistance since he saw I was an Englishman and could not speak Italian.

Needless to add, that this led to a conversation, and I learned that he had lived for many years at Cairo, hence his speaking English so well. He was a very genial fellow, and a genuine admirer of the English nation and our methods in Egypt.

Before we parted it was arranged that I should meet him the following day at the principal café in the town, and that he would introduce me to a young fellow, a friend of his, who also spoke English fluently, and who would doubtless be glad to show me around. So within five minutes of the departure of my guide I had fallen on my feet.

My luck even then was not out : just as I got off the tram I ran into the affable stranger who had walked with us from the station on the day of our arrival. He seemed so genuinely pleased to meet me again that my suspicions of him vanished at once, and I unhesitatingly accepted his offer of an " Americano " at the café close by; the fact of my being alone seemed to interest him immensely, and

he expressed astonishment at my risking remaining in Udine without understanding Italian.

In the course of conversation I learned he was Dr. Berthod, the President of an Agrarian Society, with a big warehouse and office in Udine. He asked me where I proposed to do my work, and when I said in my bedroom at the hotel, he told me that in his building there was a large room with a north light which he, speaking on behalf of his members, would be pleased if I would make use of as a studio whilst I was in Udine.

This was so unexpected that I was quite taken aback—such friendliness from a stranger quite overwhelmed me.

He would take no refusal, and insisted on my going with him to see if it would suit me.

It turned out to be a capital room, and I told him it would answer my purpose admirably, so he got some of his workmen to clear it out for me at once, in readiness for me to commence work, and promised to find me an easel and everything I required.

He refused to discuss the idea of my paying anything for it, saying they were only too pleased to help an Englishman, and that they would be delighted if I would consider it as my studio as long as I was in Udine. This was eighteen months ago, and the room is still reserved for me.

Without this studio, as I soon realised, life up at the Front for any length of time would have been terribly fatiguing and monotonous. It is difficult to convey an idea of the delight it was, having a quiet place to come back to work in after rushing about in a car for hours and probably having been under fire all the time.

To get away for a while from the turmoil of war when you were in the midst of it was a relief, like going from blazing sunshine into the cool interior of a cathedral.

CHAPTER IV

THE wonderful system on which everything was worked—Udine "the Front"—The commencement of hostilities—The 24th May—The first day of operations auspicious for Italy—Redemption of the province of Friuli—New Italian Front—Cormons—The inhabitants of Italian origin—A good practical joke—The *moral* of the troops—Unpretentious attempts at wit—High spirits of the men—The road from Udine to Cormons—Wonderful sight—Italian flags everywhere—A mystery where they came from—Wild triumphant advance of the Italian troops—Women kiss the ground—But a *lever de rideau*—Italians cross the Isonzo—Austrians on Monte Nero—Monte Nero—The capture of Monte Nero—Incredible daring of the *Alpini*—The story of the great achievement—Number of prisoners taken—The prisoners brought to Udine—Their temporary prison—The tropical heat—An ugly incident—Austrian attempt to re-take Monte Nero—Success follows success—Capture of Monfalcone and Gradisca ; Sagrado and Monte Corrada—Commencement of the attack on Gorizia—Subjects for my sketch book—Touches of human nature—High mass in the mountains—The *tentes d'abri*—Cheerfulness of men in spite of all hardships.

CHAPTER IV

EVERYTHING seemed to go as though by routine in the early operations, and from the moment war was declared and the Italian army made its " Tiger spring " for the Passes on the night of May 23rd-24th it was manifest that General Cadorna had well matured plans, and that they were being carried out without a hitch anywhere.

During the six weeks I managed to stay in Udine I had ample opportunity of observing the wonderful system on which everything was worked, and how carefully pre-arranged were the movements of troops and material. Certainly no army—not even excepting the German—ever started a war under better conditions.

Udine in the early weeks of the war was right up at " the Front," so to speak, and therefore an extremely important centre. It was practically from here that the commencement of hostilities was made.

At four o'clock in the morning of the 24th of May the Italian army crossed the Indrio, a tributary of the Isonzo, overcame a feeble resistance and entered Austrian territory.

During the entire day the onward march continued. After a preparatory attack in Monte Quirino, the important town of Cormons surrendered and a few hours later Caporetto, Cervignano, Terzo, Medea, the ancient city of Aquileia and Grado, the " Austrian Ostend," in the Adriatic. The first day of operations, therefore, dawned auspiciously for Italy.

Some fears were expressed at the time that the

hasty withdrawal of the Austrians was a ruse, and that the Italians might find themselves in a fix later on, but, as was soon proved, this was not the case, and nearly the whole of the province of Friuli, that the Austrians had held since 1866, had been redeemed with no opposition worthy of the name, and the Italian front extended from Tolmino to the sea.

I was in Cormons shortly after the entry of the troops, and it was difficult to realise that the Italians had not always been there. The inhabitants of Italian origin helped to remove as many traces as possible of the Austrian occupancy—the hated names disappeared as if by magic from shop fronts and street corners ; in fact, in a very few hours it was an Italian town again, and the good folk of Cormons had cast off their hated thraldom.

In the centre of the town is a statue of the Emperor Maximilian (it looks exactly like Beckmesser in the " Meistersingers " singing his *pricelied*), and on the day of the entry of the Italian soldiers some wag conceived the happy idea of placing a sack over the head and an Italian flag in one of the hands, an indignity that must have caused the Austrian inhabitants to gnash their teeth with impotent rage, but there were touches of humour discernable everywhere which conveyed to you more perhaps than anything else an idea of the *moral* of the troops.

Notices roughly scrawled on walls in the villages which one passed—" This way for Trieste," " Nearest road to Monfalcone," " Straight on and the second to the right for Gorizia," and so forth—unpretentious little attempts at wit which have remade their appearance again and again in every war probably from time immemorial. All this, added to the wonderful patriotic ardour and enthusiasm one saw on all sides, was very impressive.

It is certain that no troops ever went to battle in higher spirits than these splendid fellows. One heard

It meant practically scaling a cliff of rock (*see page* 41)

them marching along singing and laughing as though they had not a care in the world.

The road all the way from Udine to Cormons was a wonderful sight, and looked like a defile of troops on some national fête day rather than the opening of hostilities.

I saw the French armies on their way to the Front at the beginning of the war, flower-bedecked and bubbling over with enthusiasm, but somehow that was different to this advance of the Italians. The world war had not then commenced ; its horrors were as yet unknown—here there was no question as to what was going to happen if Italy did not " make good," so the confidence and empressment was the more stirring to my mind.

Italian flags seemed to blossom forth everywhere. It was quite remarkable the numbers of them one saw. Where they all came from was a mystery, as it was well known that the Austrians never tolerated them anywhere in the province. It was suggested that the three different colours of material were purchased separately and in different places so as not to arouse suspicion, and held in readiness to be sewn together to form the flags when the time at last arrived.

The successful operations of the first day of the war were immediately followed up by a vigorous offensive, and the Italian troops practically swept everything before them during the next few days in their wild triumphant advance, all of which, in the language of the Ring, proved the value of being ready and getting in the first blow.

Everywhere the soldiers were received with open arms by the peasantry of the redeemed province, and many touching scenes were witnessed in the villages through which they passed, villages that had long given up hope of ever being under the Italian tricolour again. In one place the women said

they would always kiss the ground the Italians were marching over.

Of course, however, all this was but a *lever de rideau*, and the merest prelude to what was going to take place in the near future when the opposing armies got to grips. The Austrians did not intend to submit to a walk over by any means, as was discovered when, a few days later, the Italians crossed the Isonzo and endeavoured to establish themselves on the slopes of Monte Nero preparatory to capturing the mountain itself, but the Austrians were found to be formidably entrenched, supported by heavy artillery and a great number of machine guns.

The chief operations for the next few weeks, therefore, were confined to the mountainous region on the left bank of the Isonzo, about six miles west of Tolmino.

Here, towering nearly 7,000 feet high, rugged and threatening, visible for miles around, is the frowning pinnacle of bare rock known as Monte Nero, for the possession of which so many gallant lives were to be sacrificed. That it was of the utmost importance it should without undue delay be captured was patent from the very start. From its northern slope the Austrian artillery commanded the entire zone of operations in the vicinity right and left.

It is almost impossible to describe the terrible nature of the enterprise the Italians found themselves up against, but which had to be carried out at all costs. One must have seen Monte Nero to form a conception of the courage that was requisite to accomplish it, yet it was eventually achieved, and under conditions which will ever redound to the glory of the Italian army.

The whole story of the capture of Monte Nero is a veritable epic of heroism and endurance. It started with a series of stubborn conflicts for the possession

of the spurs leading to the summit; these were gradually taken, and then came the crucial moment when only the actual summit remained in the possession of the Austrians. This had been transformed into a veritable fortress, and its eventual capture was probably one of the most thrilling episodes in the history of war.

The Austrians were so strongly entrenched and fortified that they had every reason to consider themselves in complete security from any attack except by long range artillery fire, and the front of their positions was further protected by nature, the side of the mountain being almost perpendicular for some distance from the top.

Many an experienced climber would hesitate to negotiate so precipitous an ascent in daylight. The Alpini, with almost incredible daring, undertook it on a moonless night.

It meant practically scaling a cliff of rock in pitch darkness, encumbered with rifle and munition; however, amongst the men, all of whom were hardy mountaineers, there was no hesitancy. In order to lessen the danger of making any noise which might arouse the suspicions of the Austrian sentries, they removed their boots and bound rags round their feet to prevent them being cut on the rocks.

Up they climbed in the Cimmerian gloom of midnight like so many panthers stalking their prey; now and again a rock, dislodged by accident, would disturb the stillness of the night as it rattled down into the valley below, and instantly the column would halt and remain motionless expecting the next moment the mountain side would be illumined by the enemy's flares and their presence discovered, but their quarry slumbered in blissful ignorance of their approaching doom, and the sentinels, fortunately, heard nothing.

Half-an-hour before dawn the various detachments

reached the summit and found themselves within a few yards of the front line of entrenchments. These were instantly rushed and captured at the point of the bayonet within a few minutes, most of their defenders being killed before they were awake.

The second line shared the same fate after a short and stubborn fight, for once aroused the Austrians fought like cornered rats and with the courage of despair, but they had no chance against the athletic Alpinist, many of whom had not even troubled to put on their boots after the long climb.

By the time the summits of the mountains were illumined by the rays of the rising sun the whole of the heights and slopes of Monte Nero were in the hands of the Italians—750 unwounded prisoners, a large quantity of rifles and ammunition and several machine guns.

The prisoners were brought to Udine, and made a sorry spectacle as they marched through the streets. It was the first time the inhabitants had seen Austrian captives, and they produced a strange impression, as what had been seen of the war so far had been only the troops passing on their way to the front line.

Most of the men were Hungarians between 17 and 25 years of age ; many were slightly wounded, their uniforms were in tatters, and the majority had no boots, but wooden shoes fastened to the foot and ankle by leather straps.

They were confined temporarily in an old building on the Piazza Garibaldi and I managed to get in and make a sketch and have a chat with one of them. He told me that most of them had come from the Serbian front and had had a very rough time. Looking round the motley crowd in the picturesque courtyard, I could quite believe him, but the men seemed quite reconciled to their fate and taking it very philosophically.

There was a group playing cards in one corner, and lying about in the shade were others chatting and smoking long German pipes, or sleeping peacefully. The heat that day was terrific, and certainly the prisoners in their scanty attire had a better time of it than their guards in full uniform.

Mentioning the tropical heat recalls to my mind a very curious incident which occurred when the prisoners were being brought into camp, and which gave a vivid idea of the awful conditions in the Austrian positions the suddenness of the Italian attack had brought about.

Some soldiers were bringing up big canteens full of water to be served out in due course, when suddenly there was a veritable stampede amongst the prisoners, and before it could be stopped there was a wild fight to get at the water. So overwhelming was the rush that the carriers were literally swept aside.

The struggle only lasted a few moments, as it was, of course, only a question of who was biggest and strongest ; then those who had got at the receptacles flung themselves on the ground and literally buried their faces in the water, lapping it up greedily like so many animals, whilst their weaker comrades tried madly to drag them away to get at it also. It was a sickening spectacle, and proved how, under certain conditions, some human beings revert instantly to their primordial nature.

The capture of Monte Nero by the Italians appeared to put the Austrians on their mettle, and they made every endeavour to retake it.

Battalion after battalion was thrown against the position, whole regiments were destroyed in the vain attempt to dislodge the *Alpini*, and as a last resource the Austrians brought up their own mountain troops, the famous " Kaiser Jagers," but with no more success.

Thus the first few weeks of war fully bore out the expectations of those who were convinced that the skill of General Cadorna and the spirit of the Italian army would be more than a match for any efforts of the Austrians, and justified the confidence which was felt on all sides.

Events moved rapidly during those early weeks of the war, and success followed success without intermission.

Monfalcone, the seaport on the Adriatic, with its important shipbuilding yards, Gradisca and Sagrado were added to the list of Austrian towns captured by the Italians in June, together with the important position of Monte Corrada. All of which represented a distinct advance into enemy territory in the direction of Trieste.

It was not, however, a "walk over," and the Italians had to pay dearly in places for their successes, The fighting for the middle Isonzo continued fiercely, and there were severe losses round Plava before the place was taken. The Austrians, however, lost still more heavily.

The attack on Gorizia, which was to last so many months, may be said to have commenced about the middle of June, when the Italians were able to start bombarding the fortifications of Santa Maria, San Pietro, San Marco, and Santa Lucia, besides the Austrian positions dominating the town, especially Mount San Gabriele.

Of course all this meant long range artillery duels day after day, which presented but little spectacular interest, though it was obvious that there was method in all this vast expenditure of ammunition, purposeless as it may have appeared to the layman ; to me as an artist, however, there were plenty of subjects for sketches, and without having to search for them through field glasses. Not far afield there were always interesting incidents—little touches of human

nature in the camps and on the road that fortunately for me had so far escaped the attention of the ubiquitous photographer.

On one occasion, for instance, I saw Mass being celebrated in a small encampment in the mountains ; for it must be remembered that the innate piety and religious spirit of the Italian Army have been evident in every step of our Ally's campaign against Austria.

On a road in the wild district near Pontebba a rude altar of rough boxes was set up—the altar cloth was a soldier's blanket—the priest's assistants were soldiers.

It was a common soldier who rang the bell at the Elevation of the Host, and the kneeling troops told of the devout spirit in which they had entered not only into the Divine Service but also into the war.

A battery was passing along the road at that moment, and the artillerymen bared their heads and piously made the sign of the Cross, whilst a sentry before a row of grey tents fell on his knees.

Even in the haste of a rapid transport of guns, reverence was not forgotten, although it was not possible for the convoy to stop. The kneeling troops were *Alpini*, who were encamped in this mountainous district and had already figured gallantly in action.

The operations on the frontier in the vicinity of Pontebba were especially interesting from an artistic point of view. The scenery here is magnificent, and much of the fighting took place along the big military highway constructed by Napoleon to connect Milan with Vienna.

It was always a pleasure to be amongst the troops, and it was an endless source of astonishment to me to see how they had in so short a time settled down to the irksome daily routine of warfare as it exists at the rear of the fighting line.

The glorious summer weather doubtless con-

tributed in no small degree to the high spirits of the soldiers, for camp life in the Italian army is very different to that of the English—it is far more picturesque, but of comfort there is very little, it appeared to me. The quaint *tentes d'abri* afford very slight shelter either against the intense glare and heat of the Italian sunshine, or the cold and rain in bad weather, yet the men appeared to be thoroughly happy and contented under any conditions.

It may be said that it is all a question of habit or rather custom; but there is no doubt that the English Tommy expects to be, and is, pampered in the way of quarters and catering to an extent that would astonish the Italian soldier if he could see it; as a matter of fact, it was frequently a revelation to me what these men had to put up with at times, and their invariable cheerfulness in spite of all hardships and discomfort.

CHAPTER V

UDINE the Headquarters of the Army—The King—His indefatigability—His undaunted courage—A telling incident—The King with the troops—Love and sympathy between Victor Emanuele and the men—Brotherhood of the whole Army—A pleasant incident—Men salute officers at all times—Laxity shown in London—Cohesion between rank and file—The Italians of to-day—The single idea of all—Udine crowded with soldiers—The military missions of the allied nations—Big trade being done—Orderly and sedate crowd—Restaurants—The food—The market place—The Cinemas—Proximity of the fighting—The Café " Dorta "—Pretty and smartly-dressed women—An unexpected spectacle—The Military Governor—The streets at night—Precautions against " Taubes "—The signal gun—Curiosity of inhabitants—No excitement—Udine a sort of haven—I remain there six weeks—A meeting with the British Military Attaché, Colonel Lamb—My stay in Udine brought to an abrupt ending—The police officer in mufti—Am arrested—Unpleasant experience—An *agent de la Sureté*—At the police station—The commissaire—Result of my examination—Novara—Magic effect of the undelivered letter again—I write to General Cafarelli—My friends at the " Agrario "—General Cafarelli—His decision—The third class police ticket for the railway—Packed off to Florence—The end of the adventure.

CHAPTER V

UDINE, as I have pointed out, was practically " the Front " in the early weeks of the war. It was also the Headquarters of the army, and every building of importance in the town had been requisitioned for Staff purposes.

It was said that the King and the Generalissimo were living there ; but this, of course, was only surmise, although one was constantly seeing them motoring through the streets.

In fact, after a time one got to recognise instantly the Royal Fiat, however grimy and bespattered with mud it might be, for the King appeared indefatigable and was out and about in all weathers, and was said to have visited all the sectors of the Front and to be never satisfied unless he saw for himself all that was going on amongst the troops.

His undaunted courage is proverbial in Italy, and no danger, however great, deters him going anywhere if he sets his mind on it, as his personal staff knows only too well. In this connection I recollect a story that was told which will illustrate this.

On one occasion His Majesty expressed his intention of joining the advance guard on a height just occupied and which was being heavily fired on by the enemy. An officer of *Alpini* respectfully pointed out the danger and difficulty of attempting it. The King laughingly replied that where the *Alpini* could go an old Chamois-hunter like himself could also go, and insisted on climbing to the position.

The presence of the King always stimulated immensely the enthusiasm of the troops, and this was particularly noticeable when he accompanied

the first brigade which crossed the Isonzo on a bridge thrown by the Engineers.

It is this desire to be not only with but amongst his soldiers and sharing their perils that has helped so much to establish the sort of fraternal love and sympathy that exists between Victor Emanuele and the men, which one cannot fail to notice whenever the word goes round " Here comes the King."

It was quite touching to hear on all sides the expressions of affection of the big rough soldiers for the wiry little man, covered with dust, who saluted one and all so genially as he whirled past in the big car.

It is this feeling of brotherhood of which the King sets the example that animates the whole army—one could not fail to be struck by it—officers, non-commissioned officers and men are all on the most friendly terms together and there is probably no more democratic army in the world to-day than the Italian.

In this connection I recall a pleasing incident I witnessed one day on a mountain track ; an officer riding a mule at the head of a small detachment of soldiers, who were plodding along stolidly in the intense heat, was reading his newspaper aloud for the benefit of them all. Curiously enough this *camaraderie* leads to no impairment of discipline—rather the contrary perhaps, as for instance, one sees men go out of their way, so to speak, to salute officers at all times, not as a matter of duty only, but to show their respect for their rank.

I was more particularly reminded of this on my return to London, where the laxity shewn by the rank and file towards officers in the matter of saluting in the streets is particularly noticeable.

The effectual result of this cohesion between the rank and file in the Italian Army is proved by the zeal which animates all, and which helps to lighten the most irksome duties.

A rude altar of rough boxes was set up (*see page* 45)

During the six weeks I spent in and around Udine practically alone I had ample opportunity for studying the character of the Italian officer and ordinary soldier under true war conditions, and the more I saw of them the more I liked them and admired their fine qualities.

These virile, self-possessed specimens of the Italy of to-day present a remarkable contrast to those one recollects of the older generation, for in the matter of physique the Italian army now in the field can compare favourably in every respect with any other army in the world.

From the highest officer to the most humble private, one and all are animated with but a single idea—that of thrashing the Austrians and restoring to Italy the territory which is hers by right. But there is no frothy bombast about them ; in the town, as in the trenches, though the conversation always reverted to " la guerra," it was to discuss it in the sober, self-contained manner of the strong man who knows his own strength and therefore does not deem it necessary to insist on it.

As might have been expected, Udine, owing to its proximity to the enemy's lines, was crowded with soldiers, and during the evening, when officers and men were off duty, it was almost difficult to walk along the main streets.

The three great allied nations were represented in the throng also, as " military missions " soon arrived in the town, and it was very pleasing to see Russian, French and English officers in their respective uniforms, fraternising everywhere with the Italians. Since then Japan, Belgium, and Serbia have also sent representatives, so there is now quite a foreign military colony as it were, with officers and permanent staffs.

The shops, cafés and restaurants were evidently doing a big trade, but it was always a very orderly

and sedate crowd of young fellows one saw everywhere, and displayed far less ebullition of animal spirits than one would see in a French garrison town.

Although fighting was taking place within an hour's motor run, nothing in the usual life of Udine was changed. There were several good restaurants, which were crowded for lunch and dinner, the delightful old twelfth century market-place that is one of the artistic treasures of the town, presented every day the customary scene of peaceful animation and brilliant colour one always associates with Italy, and which has such charm for the painter ; it was " business as usual," although you could generally hear the thunder of the guns quite distinctly.

Nor was amusement lacking of an evening, as there were two large Cinemas open, and at one a sort of music-hall entertainment as well ; both these places were so well attended by the civilians, as well as the military element, that it was always difficult to get anything but bare standing room.

Here again the proximity of the fighting would often be vividly brought home to you when the booming of the guns was audible in an interval of the performance.

Of course the ordinary soldiers were only allowed out of barracks up to a certain hour—I forget for the moment what that was—so the streets looked comparatively deserted when they had gone.

The principal cafés were, however, well patronised up till closing time, and " Dorta's," in particular, was always very crowded with officers and civilians.

It was quite remarkable the number of pretty and smartly dressed women one saw about of a day—of course many of these were the wives or daughters of residents, but there were others also. On a fine

Sunday morning, the Church parade on the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and along the Via Mercato Vecchio was quite one of the sights of Udine, for it was usually a galaxy of beauty and fashion.

To anyone like myself, newly arrived in the town, and expecting to find himself in the midst of warlike scenes considering how close one was to the operations, this unexpected spectacle came as a positive shock.

After a week or so, however, this impression of incongruity wore off, and you ended by feeling that after all these dainty apparitions in the streets or the restaurants were not so unpleasant to look on, and that they served to accentuate the grimness of the dust-covered warriors around them.

With the general advance of the Army, the majority of the troops was gradually shifted nearer the new Front, but the whole district was, and still is, under the command of a military governor, who wields the power of a dictator so far as the civilian element is concerned.

The streets were practically pitch dark on moonless nights, only the merest pretence of a glimmer of electric light in blue bulbs being allowed here and there, though the Stygian gloom was constantly beingillumined bythe powerful headlights of military cars passing through—a curious anomaly which appeared to me quite inexplicable.

Of course these precautions were taken owing, as I have said, to the proximity of Udine to the enemy's lines and the fact in consequence that neighbourly visits from " Taubes " were frequently received, though fortunately they seldom succeeded in doing any damage or causing loss of life.

On several occasions, though they provided us with spectacular displays overhead, as there were always a number of our *Capronis* in the aerodrome close by in readiness to go up and tackle these

intruders as soon as they were sighted, and there are few things more exciting to witness than an aerial fight.

A signal station was established on one of the highest buildings, and on the approach of a Taube a gun was fired to give the inhabitants timely warning. though the usual effect of this warning at first was to bring crowds into the streets to catch a glimpse of what was going on aloft rather than induce the people to make for safety. After a few of these alarms the novelty wore off, and though it cannot be said that scarcely any notice was taken of them, there was certainly no undue excitement when the signal gun was heard.

As will be gathered, therefore, the war, beyond transforming Udine from a picturesque, sleepy, little provincial town into a bustling and important military centre, had not effected so much change in it materially as might have been expected, so it was a sort of haven to return to after one had been in the zone of actual operations for a time.

I had now been up at the Front for six weeks, and was beginning almost to consider myself as settled permanently at Headquarters. How I managed to stay so long undisturbed I could not understand, considering the stringency of the police regulations.

It may have been that the authorities winked complacently at my presence during all these weeks in consequence of my being an artist as distinct from a journalist, for by this time I made no attempt at secrecy since no one took any notice of me apparently, and I went about everywhere as freely as if I had an official permit from the General himself.

I recollect one day meeting Colonel Lamb, the British Military Attache, in the street. He had just arrived from Rome. He expressed his surprise at seeing me in Udine, and asked how long I had been there ; when I told him he laughingly said : " You'll

end by being sent to prison and perhaps shot one day."

I replied in the same vein that I had been expecting it to happen every day for weeks past, so should not be surprised when it did.

Well, whatever the reason, I had no unpleasant attention shown me until the last few days of my stay, and then it was suddenly brought home to me that I had overstayed my welcome.

It was really the last thing I was expecting to happen, as I had got on quite friendly terms with the Commandant of the Carabinieri, and only a few days previously the Commissaire of Police had given me his official sanction to remain in Udine. The order for what now took place must therefore have emanated from someone in higher authority than either of these gentlemen, so there was absolutely no appeal from it, as will be seen. It came about in this wise.

I was leaving the restaurant where I usually lunched when a tall, well-dressed civilian came up to me, and, as far as I could make out, since I hardly understood a word of Italian, asked me if I were Mr. Price, and if I were that person would I do him the inestimable favour to walk with him as far as the Questura, as they had something of importance they desired to communicate to me at once.

I guessed at once that he was a police officer in mufti, and that it was not for anything particularly agreeable to me that he stopped me thus. Thinking that perhaps he did not know that my papers were quite in order, I pulled out my police pass and shewed it to him ; but this was not what he meant.

With the old time garrulity of the Italian, and unctiously wringing his hands as though he was in mental distress, he made me understand that it was very distasteful to him to have to interrupt my walk, but it was merely for a few moments, when I

should be free to resume it, and he would again offer me his sincere apologies for venturing to accost me, but it was of sufficient importance for him to urge me to go with him now, as I was expected and being waited for. This is what I gathered from the few words I understood of all this verbosity.

Just at this moment, as luck would have it, someone I knew came along. He spoke a little French, so I asked him to tell me what it all meant. It was as I had guessed : this was an *Agent de la Sureté*, and I had to go with him to the police station at once for reasons which would be explained when I got there.

Of course there was no arguing the matter ; I realised that it was all mock politeness I had been treated with, and that if I made any objection I should be spoken to very differently. At the station I was asked to produce "all my papers and my passport" ; these were taken into an adjoining room. In a few minutes they were returned to me, and I was informed that I would hear further in the matter. Whereupon I was allowed to go, much mystified as to what was going to happen next.

The following morning a note was left at my Hotel to the effect that at 10 o'clock I was called upon to present myself again with "all my papers and my passport" at the police station, accompanied by someone to interpret for me. A young fellow who spoke French fairly well consented to accompany me.

I was taken before the Commissaire, the one who had given me the *permis de séjour*, and two other officials, who began to ply me with questions as to how I came to be in Udine, what I came for, and how long I had been there, together with a lot of other questions which were very irritating since the Commissaire knew all about me already, as he had his own signature before him on my papers.

There was a short conversation between the Commissaire and the officials, who looked towards me meanwhile in a friendly manner as I thought. I was soon to be undeceived though. They then turned to my interpreter and announced the upshot of these mysterious happenings.

" Well, what's the result of all these proceedings ?" I asked him.

" You are to be sent to Novara," he replied unconcernedly.

" Be sent to Novara," I repeated in amazement. " Where's Novara ? "

" Oh, a long way from here, near the Swiss frontier—beyond Turin." He then went on to say as coolly as though it could be but of little interest to me.

" They say you must leave Udine by the first train."

It suddenly flashed through my memory that I had heard of Novara as the town where Austrians and Germans were interned. I was so stupified for a moment that I did not know what to say. Then I told him as calmly as I could to ask the Commissaire what was the good of having a passport and such papers as I had if I was to be treated the same as an alien enemy. I could understand being requested to leave Udine, but not being ignominiously sent away. The Commissaire merely shrugged his shoulders and replied those were his orders.

Suddenly I remembered the letter for the Military Commandant of Udine I had still in my pocket, fortunately. I pulled it out and asked to be at least permitted to deliver it before I was sent away.

Its effect was, as it always had been, magical. The Commissaire looked at the address attentively, motioned me politely to be seated, then picking up my passport, took it with the letter into an adjoining room. He was gone some few minutes.

When he returned he told my interpreter to inform me that if I would write out at once a full explanation of my object in coming to the Front and my reasons for desiring to remain, the letter should be given to General Cafarelli, who would decide what I had to do. I was warned, however, that there must be no delay, the statement must be delivered in a few hours. My papers were returned to me, and I was then allowed to leave the office.

My good friends at the " Agrario " came to my help and got the letter drawn up in Italian and duly forwarded. The following day I had again to present myself at the Questura, and I was at once taken to the General's offices in the adjoining building.

General Cafarelli, the Governor of Udine, was a very tall, thin, elderly man, with a grey beard, strikingly like the popular pictures of Don Quixote. He held my *dossier* in his hand, and had evidently just read it. He received me in the most frigid and unsympathetic manner, and I felt instantly that if it depended on him I was done with Udine and the Front.

Without waiting for anything I might have to say, he said abruptly in French : " You must leave Udine at once ; you are not permitted to remain."

I produced the famous letter, and asked if he could tell me when I could deliver it as it might perhaps affect his decision.

To my surprise he just glanced at the superscription, then without hesitating, opened it and read it through.

" This does not alter your case. You leave today," he snapped out.

" But not for Novara I hope, mon General," I ventured to remark.

" Well, I will make you that concession, but you must go either to Turin or Florence or Rome by the first train," and then he added significantly :

" I hope you will make no difficulty about it." There was no mistaking his meaning.

" Of course I will not," I replied ; " my only regret is that I should have given you any trouble at all, and I trust you will understand that my motive in coming here was perfectly innocent."

This appeared to mollify him considerably.

" Well, it is understood then that you leave to-day ; the police will provide you with a ticket for whichever of the places I have named you decide to go to." Then, to my surprise, he held out his hand as I turned to leave the room, and said in almost a friendly manner :

" The question of permitting correspondents to visit the Front is being considered, and perhaps in another month or so you will be allowed to return."

" Then I will say *au revoir*, not *adieu*, mon General," I said, with an attempt at cheerfulness I did not feel as we shook hands.

Well, to cut a long story short, I was packed off to Florence that evening with a third class police ticket, and with instructions to report myself immediately on my arrival there to the Commissaire of Police.

Railway journeys are not pleasant in Italy in midsummer—and in third class especially—but I had no option as I was not permitted to go in another class by paying the difference in the fare.

It was therefore a hot and tiring journey, but not quite so bad as I expected. True, the carriage was crowded all the way, but I found the peasant folk who were my travelling companions kindly unobtrusive people, and had I been able to converse with them should probably have found them very interesting ; as it was, when they discovered I was an Englishman they insisted on giving me a corner seat—a little touch of good feeling which was as pleasing as it was unexpected.

At Florence the formalities I had to go through were soon over. My arrival was evidently expected. I was given a *permis de séjour*, with a little note certifying I had duly reported myself, and then I was free once more.

CHAPTER VI

FLORENCE in war time—War correspondents to visit the Front—I receive a letter from Mr. Capel Cure of the Embassy—Return to Rome—Signor Barzilai, Head of Foreign Press Bureau—I am officially "accepted"—Correspondents to muster at Brescia—Rome to Brescia via Milan—The gathering of the correspondents—Names of those present—Papers represented—The correspondent's armlet—Speech of welcome by General Porro—Plan of journey announced—Introduced to officers of Censorship—To leave war zone at conclusion of tour of Front—"Shepherding" the correspondents—Censorships established at various places—Correspondents' motor cars—Clubbing together—Car-parties—My companions—Imposing array of correspondents' cars—National flags—Cordiality amongst all correspondents and Censors—Good-fellowship shown by Italians—Banquet to celebrate the occasion.

The King appeared indefatigable and was out and about in all weathers (*see page* 49)

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CHAPTER VI

I STAYED in the City of Dante for nearly a month, and was fully engaged the whole time working up the sketches I had brought with me from the Front. It was fortunate, as I soon discovered that I had plenty to occupy me, for there was nothing whatever to be seen in Florence that conveyed any suggestion of war.

As a matter of fact, the war did not appear to affect the Florentines at all ; everything was going on in the city exactly the same as when I was there some few years before, and if you did not read the papers of a day you might have almost forgotten it. I was glad therefore to be able to keep in touch with it through the medium of my work, as I had no desire to live the life of an art student or dilettante here, delightful as it is under normal conditions.

Towards the end of July it became known that there was a chance in the near future of a restricted number of Italian and foreign war correspondents being officially recognized and permitted to visit the Front, and I received a friendly letter from Mr. Capel Cure, at the British Embassy, advising me to return forthwith to Rome if I wished to be included in the English group. I left Florence, therefore, by the first train for the capital.

For the next few days I haunted 11 bis via Pompeo Magno, the residence of Signor Barzilai, the genial President of the Italian Press Association, and the rooms of Signor Baldassarre, the Head of the Foreign Press Bureau, at the Ministero del Interno, till at last, to my great relief, I was notified that I was on the official list of correspondents.

I had been on tenterhooks all the time for fear

my escapade at Udine would militate against my being accepted.

It was then announced that the chosen few were to muster at Brescia to meet the officers appointed to act as censors and to chaperon them during a tour of the Front, which was to occupy six or seven weeks, and which would cover at least 3,000 kilometres.

From Rome to Brescia is quite a long journey, via Milan, where one has to pass a night.

There was quite a big gathering at the reception of correspondents in the quaint little Town Hall where we assembled, as, in spite of the weeding-out process which had taken place in Rome, no fewer than forty-one papers were represented—twenty-six Italian, six French, seven English, and two Swiss.

As was to be expected, Italian journalism was widely represented. It had no less than twenty-six correspondents, and every town of importance in Italy appeared to have sent someone.

I cannot recall the names of all the talented fellows who had been despatched from every corner of the Peninsula to record the doings on the Italian Front.

First and foremost, of course, was Luigi Barzini, without whom the assemblage would have been quite incomplete, as he is probably the most popular of press writers in the world to-day. In Italy, in fact, he is a sort of institution, and it is certainly no exaggeration to state that he is as well-known by sight as the King or General Cadorna.

Then there were Benedetti, Baccio Bacci, Fraccaroli, Gino Piva, Giovanni Miceli, and Aldo Molinari, the black and white artist and photographer, to cite only a few names in the brilliant attroupement of Italian journalistic talent.

The French Press had six representatives: the *Temps*, Jean Carrère, one of the best known and

most popular of foreign correspondents, who speaks Italian like his mother tongue ; the *Petit Parisien*, Serge Basset ; the *Echo de Paris*, Jules Rateau ; the *Journal*, Georges Prade ; the *Illustration*, Robert Vaucher ; and the *Petit Marseillais*, Bauderesque. As genial and typically French a crew as one could meet anywhere.

The English Press was also well to the fore. *The Times*, as the most powerful of British journals on the continent, was appropriately represented by a giant in stature, W. Kidston McClure, as amiable and erudite a gentleman as ever stood six feet eight inches upright in his socks, and who, by reason of his great height, raised *The Times* a head and shoulders above the rest of us.

W. T. Massey was the *Daily Telegraph*, a good and solid representative of the older type of modern journalism ; J. M. N. Jeffries the *Daily Mail* young man, a slender stripling with brains, and bubbling over with a sort of languid interest in his work, but who, in his immaculate grey flannels and irreproachable ties, somehow gave the impression of just going on or coming off the river rather than starting on a warlike expedition ; Martin Donohoe, the *Daily Chronicle*, the very antithesis of Jeffries, burly and energetic, and in every way a typical representative of Radical journalism, which was further represented by Ernest Smith of the *Daily News*.

Gino Calza Bedolo, one of the youngest and most talented of rising Italian journalists was " lent " to the *Morning Post* for this occasion by his paper, the *Giornale d'Italia*, and a very able and spirited representative did he prove, as the readers of the *Morning Post* must have found.

And lastly, the *Illustrated London News*, by your humble servant, sole representative of English pictorial journalism with the Italian Army in the Field.

There were no Americans, as with the somewhat curious exception of the two Swiss, only the allied nations were admitted. I may add that everyone had to wear a white band round his coat sleeve bearing the name of the paper he represented.

We were received by General Porro, Sub-Chief of the Italian General Staff, on behalf of the Generalissimo, and he made a cordial speech of welcome, in which he introduced us to the officers of the censorship and detailed the arrangements that had been made to enable the correspondents to see as much as possible of the operations.

Everything for our big journey had been planned out with true Italian thoroughness, even to providing every one of us with a set of large and reliable maps, whilst on the head of giving permission to see all we desired there was no cause for complaint, as we were to be allowed to go everywhere along the Front ; the only reason for disappointment being in the information that immediately after the tour was finished we should be obliged to leave the war zone until further orders.

It was therefore to be a modified version of the modern method of shepherding the war-correspondents as initiated by the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War ; however, the latitude given as to freedom of action was very generous.

Censorships were established at important centres such as Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Belluno, and Udine, and visits to the various positions along the Front within fairly easy distance of these places were allowed.

The Correspondents were expected to have their own motor cars, and, of course, pay all expenses, but the Government supplied horses or mules for the mountaineering work whenever necessary. It had been made known in Rome that we should have to provide our own transport, so there had

been a general clubbing together with a view to sharing cars and thus dividing up the expenses which were bound to be heavy. Little coteries were thus formed, and, as might have been anticipated, the three nationalities were segregated.

When I had got to Rome I found the car-parties were already formed, and there was no room for me amongst the English, but I was lucky enough to be introduced to two very nice young fellows, Italians, Gino Calza Bedolo, of the *Giornale d'Italia*, and Aldo Molinari, of the *Illustrazion Italiana*, who gladly let me take a share in their car, as they both spoke French and were very keen on going everywhere and seeing all there was to see. I felt I had really fallen on my feet and was going to have an interesting time, and so it turned out, as will be seen.

The array of correspondents' cars was quite imposing, and as most of them were packed full up with baggage and decorated with the national flag of the occupants the effect may be imagined. It was certainly a memorable occasion for Brescia, and a crowd assembled outside the Town Hall to watch the strange scene.

The utmost cordiality sprang up immediately, not only amongst the Correspondents but with the Censors also, who were all officers selected for their thorough knowledge of French and English, and as, of course, it was also necessary that they spoke these languages fluently, this in itself helped not a little to establish at once a friendly relationship between us all.

The good fellowship shown by the Italian journalists towards their French and English confrères was quite remarkable from the very start. On the evening of the day of the reception at Brescia they invited us to a banquet to celebrate the occasion, and gave us a delightful *accueil* and a splendid dinner.

Belcredi, Vice-President of the Italian Association of Journalists, was in the chair, and made a great speech, in which he expressed the pleasure of himself and his confrères at meeting us at Brescia, and emphasizing the sincerity of the friendship between Italy and the Allies.

Jean Carrère, of the *Temps*, and McClure, of *The Times*, responded eloquently in Italian on behalf of the French and English correspondents, after which all formality ceased and the utmost *camaraderie* ensued, although we had only known each other a few hours it was also already like a gathering of old friends. It was an evening to be remembered and of the happiest augury, as will be seen.

CHAPTER VII

BRESCIA—Rough sketch of arrangements —A printed itinerary of tour—Military passes—Rendezvous on certain dates—The "off-days"—Much latitude allowed—We make a start—Matutinal hour—First experience of freedom of action—Like schoolboys let loose —In the valley of Guidicaria—First impression of trenches on mountains—A gigantic furrow—Encampments of thousands of soldiers—Like the great wall of China—Preconceived notions of warfare upset—Trenches on summits of mountains—A vast military colony—Pride of officers and men in their work—Men on "special" work—"Grousing" unknown in Italian Army —Territorials—Middle-aged men—"Full of beans"—Territorials in first line trenches—Modern warfare for three-year-olds only—Hardy old mountaineers—Heart strain—The road along Lake Garda—Military preparations everywhere—War on the Lake—The flotilla of gun-boats—The Perils of the Lake—A trip on the "Mincio" gun-boat—I make a sketch of Riva—A miniature Gibralter—Desenzano—Nocturnal activity of mosquitoes—Return to Brescia—Something wrong with the car—Jules Rateau of the *Echo de Paris*—Arrange excursion to Stelvio Pass—A wonderful motor trip—The Valley of Valtellino—The corkscrew road—Bormio—The Staff Colonel receives us—Permits our visiting positions—Village not evacuated—Hotel open—Officers' *table d'hôte*—We create a mild surprise—Spend the night at hotel.

CHAPTER VII

ONE was not long realizing that it would have been impossible to have obtained a real conception of the terrific character of the mountain warfare and the indefatigable work of the soldiers if one had not been enabled to see it for oneself at close quarters.

A better starting point than Brescia for an extended tour of the whole of the Front would have been difficult to find, as it commands comparatively easy access to the principal positions in this sector. With a reliable car and no " speed limit " the radius you could cover in a day was remarkable as we soon discovered.

It may possibly be of interest at this juncture to give a rough sketch of the " arrangements " that we found had been made for us by the Headquarters Staff. A printed itinerary was given to each correspondent, from which he could gather at a glance the programme, subject only to occasional modifications as events might warrant, for every day of the tour.

The first impression, of course, was that we were to be on a sort of " personally conducted tour," and no little disappointment ensued, but it was soon found that, although you had to adhere to it in its main points, there was really not any irksome restriction, as will be seen.

The scheme briefly was that the whole party should assemble at certain dates in the towns where Press Censorship Headquarters were established, and then officers were detailed to accompany the different parties to the positions along the Front nearest to these centres in order to explain the

nature of the operations going on, and to give any other information required.

Salvo condotti, *i.e.*, military passes, were issued to everyone ; these passes were for use on the road and in the positions, and had to be renewed at each censorship, otherwise they were valueless. Although therefore it was obligatory to present yourself at all these *points de repère* at certain dates, you could choose your own road to get to them and halt where you pleased *en route*.

The " off-days," when you were not officially visiting the positions, were to give you the opportunity of writing your articles and submitting them to the Censor, as obviously nothing could be posted without the official *visé*, though, of course, this did not prevent you from getting off as soon as you were through with him and had received your fresh permit and making for the next stopping place.

The latitude the arrangement gave to each car was demonstrated at once. We were booked to remain in Brescia for eight days, during which period there were to be no " official " excursions anywhere. Our passes were handed us, and we were free to go where we pleased so long as we turned up on time at Verona, the next stopping place.

The reason for this pleasing relaxation at the very commencement of the tour did not transpire ; perhaps it was an oversight when the programme was drawn up ; anyhow, my companions suggested our taking advantage of it and getting away from Brescia as soon as possible and making for the nearest positions. So we started off the next morning at the matutinal hour of 5 o'clock.

We had somehow thought our idea was quite original, but we found that several of our *confrères* had gone off even earlier than us, but in another direction ; we therefore had the road we had chosen all to ourselves.

As there was no particular reason for us to return that day, we decided to put up somewhere for the night, and took our handbags with us. The zone of operations we were going to is a popular region for tourists in peace time, so there was no fear of not finding lodgings somewhere.

It was a glorious summer morning, and as we sped along in the invigorating air through sleepy, picturesque villages and wide tracts of tranquil country, covered with vines and maize-fields, towards the distant mountains, it was difficult to realize that we were not on a holiday jaunt but on our way to scenes of war.

To me especially the feeling of entire freedom of action was particularly delightful after the anxious weeks I had spent in Udine and on the Isonzo front, when the mere sight of a carabinieri would make me tremble in my boots for fear I was going to be arrested. Now, with my *salvo condotto* safe in my pocket and my correspondent's "brassard" on my coat sleeve, I could look carabinieri and all such despots in the face without misgivings of unpleasant happenings.

There must have been some subtle tonic effect in the atmosphere that morning, for my companions were equally elated, and we were positively like three schoolboys let loose: even the chauffeur was infected by our boisterous spirits, and for the first few miles he pushed the car along at its top speed with reckless impetuosity.

The firing line we were making for was in the sector comprised between the Stelvio Pass and the Lake of Garda. In the valley of Guidicaria we reached the trenches, and had our first impression of the magnitude of the operations the Italians are undertaking.

What had been accomplished here during the three months since the war started was *en évidence*

before our eyes. I was fully prepared from what I had seen on the Udine front for something equally astonishing in this sector, but I must confess the scenes before me, now that we were in touch with the troops, filled me with amazement. The achievements on the middle Isonzo were great, but here they were little short of the miraculous.

It was almost unbelieveable that what we saw was only the work of three short months. Trenches and gun-emplacements confronted you on all sides.

A sort of gigantic furrow wound through the valley and climbed the mountain like some prehistoric serpent, till lost to view away up on the summits more than two thousand metres above; and round about this fantastic thing were numberless little quaint grey shapes dotted here and there on the rocks, and often in positions so steep of access that you wondered how they got up there at all, and for what purpose.

These were the encampments of the thousands of Italian soldiers who have accomplished all this marvel of mountain warfare, and in the teeth of the Austrians and of nature as it were as well, and have carried the line of entrenchments across wooded hills, meadows, torrents and snow-clad slopes.

It is safe to assert that, with the exception perhaps of the great wall of China, never before in the history of warfare have operations of such magnitude been undertaken. In many places the trenches had to be actually blasted out of the rock, and were reinforced with concrete or anything that military science or nature could offer to render them still more invulnerable.

As we advanced further into this impressive zone of military activity you realized that all your preconceived notions of mountain warfare were upset.

Instead of the fighting taking place in the valleys and passes as one would have expected, the positions

Along the big military highway constructed by Napoleon (*see page* 45)

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and even the trenches were frequently on the very summits of what one would have taken to be almost inaccessible peaks and crags, and in some places actually above the snow-line.

The whole region was positively alive with warlike energy, and what was only a few months previously a desolate and uninhabited area, had been transformed into a vast military colony, so to speak.

I was much struck with the pride of both officers and men in their work, and the evident pleasure it gave them to shew us everything, though, of course, our *salvo condotti* acted as open sesame everywhere. Visitors, still less pressmen, are not always welcome, especially when they turn up unexpectedly as we did.

Not the least astonishing feature of all these operations to my mind was the fact that men of branches of the service one does not usually associate with " special " work were working at it as though to the manner born.

The Bersaglieri, for instance, who are men from the plains, were doing sappers' jobs amongst the rocks, or stationed high up on the mountains where you would have only expected to find *Alpini* ; but they were all, I was told, gradually getting accustomed to their unaccustomed work, and often developing undreamed of capabilities, while their cheerfulness under the circumstances was always astounding, even to their own officers.

" Grousing " appears to be an unknown quantity in the Italian Army. I had a little chat with a sergeant of a Territorial regiment. He spoke French fluently, and told me he had lived several years in Paris. He was now in charge of a small detachment in a particularly exposed spot.

To my surprise I learned that the greater part of his regiment was composed of men well on in years, as one understands soldier life, most of them being close on forty, and that in his particular detachment

he had several who were nearer fifty, though they did not look it. Yet they were as cheery and "full of beans" as the youngsters, he told me.

The reason for putting men of "territorial" age in first line trenches I could not manage to ascertain, for however good physically they may be for their age, one would have thought that their place was in the rear and that younger men would always have been found in the van.

It is indisputable that modern warfare is not for "veterans," but, as our friend, Rudyard Kipling would put it, for "three-year olds only," for only youth can stand for any length of time the terrific physical and moral strain it entails.

I learned that there are a few hardy old mountaineers fighting shoulder to shoulder with the youngsters up on the peaks; but these, of course, are exceptions such as one will find anywhere, for the capability of endurance is no longer the same as it was when on the right side of thirty, and the strain on the heart at these altitudes especially is enormously increased. But to revert to our excursion.

Our road for some distance skirted the shore of Lake Garda, which is intersected by the Austrian frontier at its northern end, where the important fortified town of Riva is situated.

Here again the extraordinary preparedness of Italy was demonstrated. There were military works everywhere—barricades of barbed wire and trenches right down to the edge of the water—with men behind them watching and in readiness for any emergency.

The war had even been carried on to the Lake itself, in the form of a flotilla of serviceable gunboats which had made its appearance, almost miraculously, so it is said, within a few hours of the opening of hostilities, and practically bottling up the Austrians in their end of the lake.

This "fleet" was continually out patrolling—night and day and in all weather. What this means will be realized by anyone who knows Lake Garda, for there is probably no expanse of water in the world where navigation is more exposed to sudden peril than here. It bears the evil reputation of being the most treacherous of Italy's inland seas. Owing to its peculiar configuration and *entourage* of mountains, tempests arise so unexpectedly that unless a vessel is handled by an experienced skipper it has but little chance to reach its port safely if it is caught in one of these Lake Garda hurricanes.

A gale from the North-East will raise waves equal to anything the open sea can produce. Italy's inland Navy is therefore exposed to other perils than the guns of the Austrian batteries.

I was lucky enough to get a trip on the gunboat "Mincio," and saw much of great interest on board. Everything was carried out on strictly naval lines, so much in fact that one might have imagined oneself out at sea, this illusion being heightened by the strong wind blowing at the time and the unpleasantly lumpy seas which kept breaking over us.

The officers and crews of these boats are all picked men from the Royal Navy, and I was told that they have taken to their novel duties with the greatest enthusiasm. The "Mincio" which was of about 150, tons, carried a very useful-looking Nordenfeldt quick-firer, mounted on the fore deck, and also a big searchlight apparatus.

There are other boats of the same class, and the little "fleet" had already given good account of itself, whilst curiously enough, so far it had escaped entirely scot free from mishap, in spite of the endeavours of the Austrian gunners.

We steamed up the Lake till we were as near as prudence would permit to the fortifications which protects Riva, for me to make a sketch of it, but

we did not remain stationary long as may be imagined.

Seen from the Lake, the fortress of Monte Brione reminds one singularly of the Rock of Gibraltar in miniature, and it is said to be so honeycombed with gun embrasures as to be equally impregnable, and it is known that this impregnability is further guaranteed by mining the Lake in its vicinity.

I rejoined my companions in the car at a harbour some distance down the Lake, and we then made for Desenzano, where we thought we would spend the night as it was already late. It is a quaint little town on the lake shore, and we had no difficulty in getting rooms. To our surprise a very good hotel was open, as every place at first sight appeared to be shut up since there were no tourists to cater for.

There was no sign of military activity here, as it is many miles from the Front, but whatever was wanting in this respect was made up for by the nocturnal activity of the mosquitoes. I don't think I ever experienced anything to equal their ferocity anywhere. I have since been told that Desenzano is notorious, if only by reason of its annual plague of these pests of the night, and that they are a particular tribe indigeneous to the place.

We returned to Brescia the following day. Our excursion had been very pleasant and instructive in every respect, but what we had seen only whetted one's appetite for more. Life here in this provincial town seemed very tame when you remembered what was going on so comparatively short a distance away.

I should, therefore, have liked to get off again at once into the mountains, but it was not so easy, and for a reason that admitted of no argument. Something had gone wrong with the car, so our chauffeur told us, and it could not be put right for a few days. This was only what all motorists have continually

to put up with, so there was nothing for it but to grin and bear it.

At this juncture one of my French *confrères*, Jules Rateau, of the *Echo de Paris*, a very jovial fellow, with whom I had become very friendly, and to whom I had confided my troubles, invited me to go for a trip with him in his car, his own companion having had to go to Milan for a few days. I gladly accepted, and we arranged to attempt to get as far as the positions on the Stelvio Pass. This meant again staying away a night, as we learned it was far too arduous a journey to be done in a single day.

Our intention was to make Bormio our first stage, sleep there and push on to the Stelvio the following day.

It would be impossible to conceive a more wonderful motor trip. For scenery it is probably unsurpassed in the world. I have never seen anything to equal it. Our route part of the way went along that most romantic of lakes Idro. The road, which is magnificent, follows all the sinuosities of the shore on the very edge of the water, winding in and out, and in many places passing through tunnels in the cliff-like rocks.

You somehow had the feeling that one ought not to be on a warlike expedition in such glorious surroundings, for the grandeur of it all overwhelmed you.

Further on we passed through the valley of Valtellino, famous for its grape vines, and for several miles we were driving past the curious terrace-like vineyards in the mountain side, looking so peaceful in the glorious sunshine. Then, as we gradually ascended, the scenery changed, and we were in amongst gaunt, forbidding mountains, towering above the road on either side.

All trace of cultivation disappeared by degrees; nature here no longer smiled, grim pine forests made

black patches against the rugged slopes ; there were traces of early snow on the high peaks, and the air was becoming chilly. The contrast with the tender beauty of the lower part of the valley was impressive in the extreme.

We were now approaching the area of military operations, and occasionally we heard in the far distance the dull boom of guns. The ascent became steeper, and at length the road left the valley and began to climb up through the mountains by a series of corkscrew turns that are so familiar in mountainous districts, but here the aclivity was so steep that the turns were correspondingly numerous, and it was a veritable nightmare of a road.

Our car, a Daimler of an old model, with a big, heavy tonneau, soon began to feel the test and commenced to grunt and hesitate in a manner that was not at all pleasant, considering that we were on the edge of a precipice and there was no parapet.

The way the chauffeur had to literally coax the panting engine at each turn makes me shudder even now to think of—every time I fully expected it would fail to negotiate it, and we should go backwards and be over the edge before he could put the break on, so little space was there to spare. The only thing to do was to sit tight and trust to luck. However, we reached the top safely, and at length arrived at Bormio.

We had been advised that the first thing to do was to ascertain the whereabouts of the commanding officer of the division and get his permission to visit the positions, as it lay entirely within his discretion. Our *Salvo Condotti* being subject to such restrictions as might be deemed necessary at any place.

There was no difficulty in discovering the Headquarter Staff building ; it was a short distance from the town, in a big, new hotel and hydropathic

establishment, with fine park-like grounds. In peace time it must have been a delightful place to stay in.

The General was away, but we were received by a Staff Colonel, who spoke French. On seeing our papers he made no objection to giving us permits to visit any position in this sector, and even went so far as to suggest that we should go the following day up to the fort on the Forcola close to the Stelvio Pass, and that an *Alpino* could accompany us as guide. It was probable that we should be under fire a good part of the way, he added, but what we should see would be sufficiently interesting to compensate for the risk.

We gladly accepted his suggestion, so it was arranged we should start early the next day as we had a stiff climb before us. We then went back to the village.

It was getting towards nightfall, and the narrow main street recalled vaguely Chamonix. It was crowded with Alpine soldiers, and in the dusk they conveyed some impression of mountaineering tourists, the illusion being heightened by the clank of their hobnailed boots on the cobbles and the alpenstoks they all carried.

The village had not been evacuated as most of them are near the Front, so there were women and children about. The principal hotel was open, and we got two good rooms for the night, and what was more to the point, for we were both famished after our long drive, one of the best dinners I have had anywhere in Italy, the big cities included. It was a *table d'hôte* for the officers, but we were informed there was "probably no objection" to our dining at it.

Our appearance in the dining-room created no little surprise, as we were the only civilians present, our Press badges especially exciting much comment, as this was the first time that correspondents had been here.

Following the lead of my colleague, I bowed first to the Colonel, who was at the head of the table, then to the rest of the officers present, and we sat down at a small table by ourselves, amidst the somewhat embarrassing attention we were attracting. This soon wore off, however, as Italian officers are gentlemen not Huns, and it was evidently realised that we had permission to come to Bormio or we should not have ventured to be there.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the summit of the Forcola—We start off in "military" time—Our guide—Hard climbing—Realize we are no longer youthful—Under fire—Necessary precautions—Our goal in sight—An awful bit of track—Vertigo—A terrifying predicament—In the Forcola position—A gigantic ant-heap—Unique position of the Forcola—A glorious panorama—The Austrian Tyrol—The three frontiers—Shown round position—Self-contained arsenal—Lunch in the mess room—Interesting chat—The "observation post"—The goniometre—Return to Bormio—Decide to pass another night there—An invitation from the sergeants—Amusing incident.

CHAPTER VIII

THE summit of the Forcola is only nine kilometres as the crow flies from Bormio, but we were told that it meant covering at least three times that distance to reach our destination, and the hard climb would make it appear much more.

We therefore got off in military time in the morning, and went a bit of the way in the car till we came to a sort of wayside châlet, quite Swiss in appearance, where a detachment of *Alpini* was stationed.

On presenting our letter from the Colonel at Headquarters, the Officer in command ordered one of his men to accompany us, so leaving the car here to await our return, we started off without delay. Our guide, a brawny and typical young Italian mountaineer, leading the way at a pace that soon compelled us to ask him to slow down a bit.

We had been advised, as we were unaccustomed to climbing, not to "rush" it at first, as we had at least two hours of strenuous plodding to reach the fort, and it was a very hot day, which would make us feel the strain the more.

To our athletic *cicerone* this was evidently but an ordinary walk in the day's work; in fact, so light did he make of it that he obligingly insisted on carrying our overcoats and other paraphernalia in spite of his being encumbered with his rifle, ammunition belt and heavy cape.

We were not long in discovering that the stiffness of the climb we were undertaking had not been exaggerated, and also that we were neither of us as young as we had been. This latter point in particular

I recollect was irritatingly brought home to me at one time when we were really making splendid progress as we thought. Some *Alpini*, in full marching order, caught us up and passed us as easily as if we had been standing still. However, it was no good being discouraged because we were no longer youthful, and we continued to make our way slowly but surely up the winding rocky track.

We had got about half way, and so far there had been nothing in the nature of an incident, and no indication whatever that we were actually right up at the Front and within range of the Austrian batteries, for a dead silence had reigned in the mountains all the morning.

Suddenly, as we were crossing a comparatively level bit of boulder-strewn ground, the report of a big gun resounded in the still air, and in a few seconds we heard a wailing sort of shriek approaching, and an instant after the loud crash of a shell bursting a short distance away.

We stopped and looked at each other, uncertain what to do as there was no cover anywhere near. Our guide settled it for us without a moment's hesitation.

"The Austrians have seen us, that's why they have commenced firing in this direction; they probably think we may be part of a detachment of troops going up to the fort—we must hurry on, and with intervals of a couple of hundred yards or so between us."

There was no time to lose, for whilst he was speaking another shell burst nearer than the previous one.

So off we went again with the *Alpino* leading the way. Rateau was in the centre, and I brought up the rear. Two hundred yards are not much on the level, but on a steep mountain track the distances are difficult to estimate, so the soldier was quite out of sight at times from where I was.

The firing still continued in a desultory manner, shells dropping aimlessly here and there, with no particular object so far as one could judge, but probably with the idea of hampering any movements of troops on the mountain. Meanwhile there was no response whatever from the Italian batteries. They were letting the Austrians waste their ammunition since they were so minded.

Our goal at last came into view high above on the summit of a cyclopean wall of rock and seemingly an inaccessible point to reach. It looked an awful place to climb up to and only to be tackled by mountaineers, yet somewhere on that precipitous height there was surely a means of ascent indistinguishable from below ; and so it proved.

The track now became more and more steep and zigzag, till at length the windings terminated, and there appeared a long straight stretch, going without a break along the face of the bluff, up to the summit at an angle of at least 60 degrees. Even now when I recall it, it makes me shudder.

It was certainly not more than a couple of feet in width, and overhung an abyss hundreds of feet deep. The mere aspect of it almost gave me vertigo.

Hesitation, however, was out of the question after coming so far ; moreover, I was now quite alone, as my companions had already reached our destination ; I had to go on.

Within a few yards of the top I happened unconsciously to look down. The effect produced by the sight of the yawning gulf beneath me was terrifying : a giddiness came over me, my knees began to tremble, and had I not managed to turn and clutch frantically at a projecting piece of rock I should have lost my balance and fallen over.

I shut my eyes and held on for a few minutes, not daring to stir ; then, with a strong effort of will, I pulled myself together sufficiently to edge along

with my face to the rock and grasp hold of some barbed wire outside the opening leading into the fort ; then, of course, I was safe.

Almost needless to add that when I got inside I did not relate my perilous experience. You are not supposed to be subject to vertigo when you tackle mountain climbing ; it might prove awkward for your comrades.

A wonderful spectacle confronted me as I looked round. The Forcola is nearly 10,000 feet high, and here, right on the summit, was a veritable citadel in course of construction, with armoured trenches, sandbag emplacements for big guns, barbed wire entanglements ; in fact, everything that modern military science can contrive to insure impregnability.

The whole place was teeming with activity, and looked like a gigantic ant heap ; on all sides soldiers were to be seen at work, and it was evident that those in charge of this important position were determined to leave nothing to luck. The little that nature had left unprotected was being made good by the untiring efforts and genius of the Italians, and the Austrian chances of ever capturing the place are practically *nil*. Its curious configuration largely contributes to its impregnability and power of resistance if ever besieged.

Behind its line of armoured trenches is a deep hollow, which could shelter an army corps if necessary ; and here, under complete cover, are well-built, barrack-like buildings, in which the troops can be comfortably quartered during the long winter months when the fort is buried under yards of snow and practically isolated from the outer world.

The position on the Forcola is probably unique in the world, as it is situated exactly at a point where three frontiers meet : the Italian, Austrian and

As he whirled past in the big car (*see page* 50)

Swiss. From its sandbag ramparts on the front facing the Austrians one has the most sublime vista of mountain scenery it would be possible to conceive. It is impossible in mere words to attempt to convey anything but the faintest impression of it, yet it would be a sin of omission not to endeavour to.

As I gazed in front of me, the marvellous beauty of the scene held me in rapt suspense, and for a few moments the war passed from my mind.

The Austrian Tyrol was before me, a panorama of wondrous mountain peaks stretching away into the mist of the far distance, and towering above the highest was the mighty Ortler, crowned with eternal snow, and positively awe-inspiring in its stately grandeur.

My reverie was abruptly disturbed by the boom of a big gun. I was back again amongst realities, yet how puny did the biggest efforts of mankind at war appear in comparison with all this splendour of nature. Had it not been for the echoes produced by these giant peaks the report of even the heavy artillery would probably have scarcely been heard.

The Swiss and Austrian frontiers meet on the summit of a Brobdignagian cliff of rock of strange formation, which towers above the Forcola. Through field glasses the frontier guards and the block-houses are plainly discernable.

This overhanging proximity of the enemy strikes me as constituting a constant menace to the Italian position, as every movement within its *enceinte* is visible from the height above. The fact also of the Austrian and Swiss frontier guards being so close to each other as to be able to fraternise must inevitably conduce to espionage. Doubtless, however, all this has been well considered by the Italians, and they are not likely to be caught napping.

Rateau and I had a very cordial reception, and

the officer in command of the position took a visible pride in showing us round it and explaining everything, whilst I made a lot of interesting sketches. The ability and rapidity with which it had been constructed and fortified were worthy of the very highest praise. Such a fortress brought into being in so short a time and at such an altitude was in itself such a marvel of military capacity that one was lost in wonder at it all. Evidently no obstacle presented by nature deterred its accomplishment.

In the emplacements were guns of a calibre one certainly never expected to see except in the valley, and you were lost in conjecture how the feat of getting them up here was achieved.

Everything was approaching completion, and by the time the snow set in and the position would be practically cut off from the lower world it would be a big, self-contained arsenal with all that was necessary for carrying on its share of the general scheme of operations on the Frontier without extraneous assistance should the rigours of the Alpine winter render it unapproachable.

In the warfare in the mountains, positions develop more or less into isolated communities, as the men seldom have an opportunity of going down to the busy world below, besides which the summer is so brief at these altitudes. Even on the date we were at the Forcola, the twentieth of August, there were already unmistakable signs of the approach of winter ; the air was decidedly frosty—there had been a fall of snow a few hours previously, and most of the peaks were powdered with silvery white.

We gladly accepted the invitation to have some lunch in the mess-room, for the keen air had given both of us healthy appetites, and while we were doing justice to a well-cooked steak with fried potatoes and a flask of very excellent *Valtellino*. I had a chat with some of the younger officers,

and learned to my surprise that they had not stirred from the place since they had come up nearly three months before, and they had no hope of getting leave for a long time to come as things were developing and the winter coming along. A visit from two civilians like ourselves, who could give them some news of the outside world, was therefore a veritable red-letter day for them.

Yet, in spite of the monotony of their existence, these cheery fellows did not complain. There was always plenty to occupy their minds, they said, and prevent them from brooding over old times. To defend the Forcola at all hazards was now their sole pre-occupation ; and after all, they added, with an attempt at mirth, they might easily have been stationed in a still more isolated spot and with fewer companions. Such admirable equanimity was only what I expected to find now that I knew the Italian soldier, so it did not surprise me at all.

After lunch, as the Austrian batteries seemed to be getting busier, we strolled up to the " observation post," a sort of tunnel in which was a telephone installation and an instrument known as a " goniometre," a powerful telescope in miniature, combined with a novel kind of range-finder, through which the slightest movement of the enemy can be instantly detected and telephoned to the officers in command of the different gun emplacements. The machine is always in readiness, as it is so fixed that once it is focussed it requires no re-adjustment.

There was a small, irregular hole at the end of the tunnel that faced the enemy's line, and through this the goniometre pointed. Two soldiers were on duty, one to keep his eye on the opposite mountain, the other to manipulate the telephone. It evidently required some practice to use the telescope, as I had a good look through it and could scarcely make out anything.

When we visited the post the Italian batteries were not yet replying to what I was informed were only the usual daily greetings of the Austrians, but their response would doubtless be sent in due course, judging from the conversation of the operator with the telephone.

Everything we saw was so absorbingly interesting that we should have liked to remain on the Forcola many hours more, but time was getting on by now, and we had to think of getting back.

As may be imagined, after my experience coming up I was particularly dreading this moment to arrive. I thought it best, however, to say nothing and trust to luck in getting down without another attack of vertigo. When we said goodbye to our genial hosts, several soldiers were about to descend also, so we were to have company.

" Three minutes interval between each man and go as fast as possible," called out an officer, and off went everyone at a given signal. Rateau was just before me and, as it turned out, I was last.

I felt like the prisoners in the Conciergerie during the reign of terror must have felt as they waited their turn to go out to the fatal tumbril. Through the opening in the sandbags only a bit of the narrow pathway was visible, as it turned sharply to the right and went down the face of the cliff beyond. It was like looking out on limitless space.

" Well, goodbye and a pleasant journey," said the officer to me when my turn came.

Out I went, putting my hand over my left eye to avoid looking into the void, and I managed to run like this all the way down.

It was getting late when we got back to Bormio, so we decided to remain another night, and were glad we did, as an amusing incident occurred during the evening.

Whilst we were finishing dinner at the hotel, we

received a note inviting us afterwards to smoke a cigar and take a glass of wine with the sergeants of the regiment quartered in the town. Of course we accepted and duly turned up.

The reception—for such it was—took place in a large private room of the hotel we were staying in, and we were greeted with the utmost cordiality.

There was a big display of a certain very famous brand of champagne on a side table, and the corks soon began to fly merrily; toasts were given as usual, and everything was pleasant. During a pause a sergeant next to me, who spoke French fluently, asked me how I liked the wine.

In jocular vein I replied that it was excellent, but it was a pity it is German, as it is well known that the owner of the vineyards near Rheims is at present interned in France. To my surprise he took my words seriously; there was an icy moment as he communicated my remarks to his comrades, and then, as though with one accord, there was a crash of broken glass, and we had to finish up the evening for patriotic reasons on *Asti Spamanti*.

CHAPTER IX

FROM Brescia to Verona — Absence of military movement in rural districts — Verona—No time for sight-seeing — The axis of the Trentino — Roveretto, the focus of operations — Fort Pozzachio — A "dummy fortress"—Wasted labour—Interesting incident —Excursion to Ala—Lunch to the correspondents —Ingenious ferry-boat on River Adige—The Valley of the Adige — Wonderful panorama — "No sketching allowed"—Curious finish of incident—Austrian positions—Desperate fighting —From Verona to Vicenza—The positions of Fiera di Primiero—Capture of Monte Marmolada —The Dolomites—Their weird fascination—A striking incident—The attempted suicide—The Col di Lana—Up the mountains on mules— —Sturdy *Alpini*—Method of getting guns and supplies to these great heights—The observation post and telephone cabin on summit—The Colonel of Artillery—What it would have cost to capture the Col di Lana then—The Colonel has an idea—The idea put into execution—The development of the idea—Effect on the Col di Lana—An object lesson—The Colonel gets into hot water— The return down the mountains—Caprili—Under fire—We make for shelter—The village muck-heap—Unpleasant position—A fine example of coolness—The wounded mule—An impromptu dressing.

CHAPTER IX

IT has been said that "who holds the Trentino holds not merely the line of the Alps and the Passes, but the mouths of the Passes and the villages which debouch into the Lombard Plain."

The significance of this statement was being continually brought home to me here on this northern frontier of Italy, and you could not shut your eyes to the fact that the very safety of the whole country depended on the army making good its "tiger spring" in the first hours of the war.

It was not so much the necessity for an aggressive movement, but for what one might term a successful defensive—offensive, and it cannot be gainsaid—and even the Austrians themselves would admit it, that in this respect the Italians scored everywhere along the line.

General Cadorna's remarkable power of intuition was evidenced by every movement of the army from the outset, but nowhere more noticeably than in the Trentino sector at this early stage of the war, when the slightest miscalculation on his part would most assuredly have spelt irretrievable disaster for Italy.

We were to have abundant proof of what his organizing genius, combined with the patriotic ardour of the troops, had been able to accomplish in the short space of three months.

After eight days spent in and around Brescia we motored to Verona, the next stage as arranged on our programme. Our road was across country, and therefore some considerable distance from the Front, so beyond being a delightful trip through glorious scenery, there was nothing very special about it; touring motorists having done it hundreds of times.

There was a noteworthy absence of any signs of military movements in the rural districts, and the peasants were apparently going about their usual peaceful avocations as unconcernedly as though the war were in another country instead of being a comparatively short distance away. In this respect, however, one felt that the motor journeys we were scheduled to make from centre to centre would prove exceedingly interesting, as they would afford us an insight of the conditions prevailing in the rear of the Front, not an unimportant factor in forming one's impressions.

In Verona, had one been holiday making, many hours might have been profitably spent in " doing " the place. As it was, my time was fully occupied from the hour we arrived till the moment we left, and it was, I am grieved to have to confess it, only by accident that I was able to snatch the time to see anything of the artistic treasures of the famous old city.

As a matter of fact, you scarcely had a moment to your self if you wanted to get any work done, as we only remained three days in Verona.

The reason for thus curtailing our stay did not transpire. In this sector of the Front the most important operations in the Trentino were taking place, and the Austrians were straining every nerve in order to stay the victorious progress of the Italians, but the lightning rapidity of their advance had proved irresistible, and had forced a retirement to their second line. To dislodge them from this was the task the Italians had before them when we were in Verona.

The axis of the Trentino is obviously Trent, and in due course of time it will doubtless fall into the hands of the Italians, but the date of that event is on the knees of the gods.

Meanwhile the focus of the operations in August

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1915, was the fortified position of Roveretto, which has been described as the " strategic heart " of the Trentino, and which guards the Austrian portion of the valley of the Adige. Enclosed within several rings of entrenchments and an outer chain of modern forts of the most formidable character, it presented a redoubtable barrier to the advance of the Italians into the Trentino in this direction.

But the lightning-like strategy of Cadorna upset all the plans of the Austrian generals and, formidable though these defences were, they were gradually being mastered.

Fort Pozzachio, which might have proved the most serious obstacle of all, and have involved a long siege before it was captured, turned out to be little more than a dummy fortress in so far as defensive possibilities were concerned, and had to be abandoned at the commencement of the war. This step being decided on by the Austrians in consequence, as they stated in their *communiqué*, of its not being in readiness to offer any prolonged resistance if besieged.

It transpired later that, although years had been spent working on it and vast sums of money expended, it was so far from being completed when war was declared that its heavy armament had not yet arrived. It had been intended to make of it a stronghold which would be practically impregnable.

Even now, it is a veritable modern Ehrenbreitstein, but with this difference : it is not built on a rock but excavated out of the summit of a lofty craig, which is quite inaccessible from the Italian side. Although only about four miles from Roveretto, its surrender did not help the Italians over much, in so far as the operations in that zone were immediately concerned, but its loss must have been a severe blow to Austrian pride.

It was said that it had been the intention of the

Austrians to blow it up rather than let the Italians reap the advantage of all the labour that they had wasted on it, and in this connection there was a story going round at the time that seemed circumstantial enough to be worth recounting.

On the day of the occupation of the fortress an engineer officer, strolling about examining the construction of the place, happened to catch his foot in what he took to be a loose telephone wire, which had apparently been accidentally pulled in from outside.

In disengaging it his attention was attracted by a peculiar object attached to the wire, when to his surprise he found that it was an electrical contrivance connected with a live fuse leading to a positive mine of dynamite in one of the lower galleries.

A small splinter of rock had somehow got mixed up with the detonator, and thus, as though by a miracle, the fortress and the Italian troops in it had been saved from destruction. Almost needless to add, the wire led from the nearest Austrian position.

We only made one excursion from Verona, but it was of extreme interest in view of what was taking place at the time in this sector of the Front. It was to Ala, a small Austrian town in the valley of the Adige, which had been captured a few weeks previously.

There had been some sharp fighting in the streets, as many of the houses bore witness to, but its chief interest to us lay in the fact that it was in redeemed territory, and actually within the portals of Austrian Trentino. Like, however, most of the liberated towns I had visited, Ala was more Italian than Austrian.

The Mayor offered a lunch to the correspondents, and the usual patriotic toasts followed. Afterwards we motored to the nearest position, which was only a short distance from the town. Crossing the river

The whole region was positively alive with warlike energy

(*see page* 75)

Adige on our way by an ingenious ferry-boat, constructed by the engineers, the Austrians having destroyed the only bridge in the vicinity. The "ferry" consisted of two big barges clamped together, then boarded over and steered by an immense paddle projecting from the after part. It was worked on the fixed-rope and sliding-pulley principle, the swift current supplying the motive power.

We had all been looking forward to getting a good conception of the operations, which just then were of vital importance, but we were to be disappointed; we were only to be permitted a long range view.

On reaching a small hamlet on the bank of the river a few hundred yards further on we were informed we could not proceed beyond this point. We had, therefore, to be content with what we could see from the roadway, which overlooked the river.

The *coup d'oeil* was magnificent, though not so impressive as what we had seen previously. Before us stretched the broad valley of the Adige; its swiftly running stream divided up here by numerous gravel islets. On the opposite bank was the railway line to Trent and the town of Seravalle; whilst facing it on our side was Chizzola.

Away in the distance bathed in the effulgence of the glorious summer afternoon, were the Stivo and other high hills, on which are the forts guarding Roveretto, hidden from our view by a bend in the river.

Now and again one saw a tiny piff of white smoke, and heard the muffled boom of artillery, but this was the only indication that any operations were in progress. It was all so vast and so swamped as it were by the immensity of the landscape that it was difficult to grasp what was taking place.

A few hundred yards further down the road where we were standing was the picturesque village of Pilcante, almost hidden in luxuriant foliage.

In the immediate foreground and standing out in discordant detail was a barbed wire entanglement barricading the road, and guarded by a detachment of infantry ; whilst immediately below the parapet which skirted the pathway, a cottage and a small garden on a spot of ground jutting into the river had been transformed into a sort of miniature " position" with an armoured trench, disguised by small trees stuck in the walls.

It occurred to me that all this would make an interesting sketch ; as a matter of fact, it was the only subject that had appealed to me that day, so I got out my book, and had just finished it when I felt a touch on my shoulder and someone whispered in my ear :

" Be careful, sketching is not allowed here." I looked round—it was one of the officers accompanying us.

" Not allowed ? " I queried ; " surely there must be some mistake."

" Not at all," he replied ; " special instructions were issued by the General that no sketches or photographs were to be made here."

As this was the first time I had heard of any restrictions since we had started on the tour, my surprise may be imagined, and the more especially as nothing apparently could have been more innocent than the subject I had chosen.

" Well, I'm sorry, but what you tell me comes too late as I have already made a sketch," said I, showing it to him. " What shall I do ? "

The officer, a very good fellow, laughed and shrugged his shoulders : " Put your book back in your pocket and don't let anyone see it ; there are several staff-officers about."

The finish of the incident was equally curious. I worked up a double page drawing from the sketch in question, and, of course, submitted it to the

censors. It aroused a good deal of comment, but it was eventually " passed " on condition that I altered the title and took out all the names of the towns, mountains, etc. ; only the vaguest suggestion as to where I had made it being permitted.

In spite of the fact that the Austrians had the geographical advantage of position almost everywhere, and that their frontier was comparatively so close to many important Italian cities, the intrepid advance of the Italian troops upset all the calculations of the Austrian generals, and, instead of advancing into Italian territory, they found themselves forced to act on the defensive some distance to the rear of their first line positions, and well inside their own frontier. But it was no easy task for the Italians, and tested their valour and endurance to the utmost.

The fighting in the ravines and on the sides of the mountains was of the most desperate character, for in this warfare at close quarters it is man to man, and individual courage tells more than it does down on the plains.

Here, in the fastnesses of nature, every clump of trees or isolated rocks are potential ambuscades. So it requires the utmost caution, combined with almost reckless daring, to advance at any time.

The Austrians, though well provided with heavy artillery, were quite unable to hold on to their positions. It was brute force pitted against skill and enthusiastic courage, and brute force was worsted as it generally is under such conditions.

Our two next " stages," Vicenza and Belluno, brought us into the very heart of the fighting on the line of the Italian advance in the Eastern Trentino towards Bolzano and the region round Monte Cristallo.

We halted a couple of days at Vicenza to enable us to visit the positions of Fiera di Primero. The

Italian lines here were some distance inside Austrian territory, so we had a good opportunity of judging for ourselves the difficulties that had to be overcome to have advanced so far, as well as the preparations that had been made by the Austrians for their proposed invasion of Italy.

Cunningly concealed trenches, barbed-wire entanglements and gun emplacements commanded every approach, whilst protecting the advance of troops. It seemed incredible that such well planned works should have been abandoned.

But here as elsewhere the lightning strategy of Cadorna left the Austrian commanders no option. Monte Marmolada, 11,000 ft. high, and other mountains on which the Austrians had placed heavy artillery, were captured by degrees. The strategic value of these positions was incontestable.

Unless one has seen the Dolomites it is impossible to form any conception of what these successes mean or the terrible difficulties that had to be surmounted to gain them.

Neither Dante nor Doré in their wildest and most fantastic compositions ever conceived anything more awe-inspiring than warfare amidst these towering peaks.

At all times they exercise a kind of weird fascination which is positively uncanny; add the thunder of modern artillery and the effect is supernatural. You try hard to realize what it means fighting amongst these jagged pinnacles and on the edges of the awful precipices.

Death, however, has little terror for the men, judging from the look on the faces of the mortally wounded one saw from time to time brought down from the trenches.

A little incident related to me by Calza Bedolo brings home the spirit of Italy's soldiers.

He had shortly before come upon a stretcher-party

carrying down from the mountains a very dangerously wounded man. Upon enquiry as to how the wound had been caused he was informed that it was a case of attempted suicide.

What had led up to this desperate act ? It appeared that for some trivial breach of discipline the man had been deprived of the privilege of a place in the front trenches and sent to a position in the rear !

The most important of all the strategic points at that time was the Col di Lana, which dominates the Falzarego and Livinallongo passes, close to Cortina d'Ampezzo. Here the Austrians were putting up a defence which was taxing the strength and resources of the Italians, to their utmost, but it was gradually being overcome.

Every mountain which commanded the position was being mounted with guns of the heaviest calibre, and big events were said to be looming in the near future.

As a matter of fact, it was only six months later that the Italians succeeded in capturing the Col di Lana, so strongly were the Austrians entrenched on it. A young engineer conceived the idea of mining it, and so successful was he that the entire summit of the mountain, with the Austrian positions, was literally blown away.

One of the most interesting of the excursions the English group of correspondents made was to the top of a mountain facing it. As it would have been a very trying climb for amateur mountaineers like ourselves, mules were considerately supplied by the General of the division. So we accomplished the ascent in easy fashion, for it was certain that very few of us would have tackled it on foot.

The sturdy *Alpini* who accompanied us treated the excursion as a good sort of joke apparently, and plodded steadily alongside us in the best of spirits, laughing now and again at our vain efforts to keep

our steeds from walking on the extreme edge of the precipices.

This ride gave us a splendid opportunity of seeing how the Italians have surmounted the difficulty of getting heavy artillery to the very summits of mountains, where no human foot had trodden before the war broke out. Rough and terribly steep in places though the road was, still it was a real roadway and not a mere track as one might have expected to find considering how rapidly it had been made. Men were still at work consolidating it at the turns on scientific principles, and in a few weeks, with the continual traffic passing up and down it, it would present all the appearance of an old established road.

It is the method of getting the guns and supplies up these great heights in the first instance that "starts" the road as it were. Nothing could be simpler or more efficacious.

It consists in actually cutting the track for the guns just in advance of them as they are gradually pushed and hauled forward. The position and angle of the track being settled before starting by the engineers.

This, of course, takes time at first, especially when the acclivity is very steep, but it has the advantage of breaking the way for whatever follows. The rough track is then gradually improved upon by the succeeding gun teams, and so a well constructed zig-zag military roadway gradually comes into being.

We left the mules a short distance from the summit and had to climb the rest of the way. Instead of an artillery position as we expected to find, it was an observation post, with a telephone cabin built in a gap in the rocks, and a hut for half a dozen soldiers on duty.

The little station was quite hidden from the Austrians, although only a couple of thousand yards

distant. It was a most important spot, as from here the fire of all the batteries round about was controlled.

We were received by the Colonel commanding this sector of the artillery, a grizzled warrior, wearing a knitted woollen sleeping cap pulled well down over his ears, which gave him a somewhat quaint and unmilitary appearance.

The " observation post " was merely a small hole through the rocks, and so awkward to get at that only two people could look through it at the same time. Immediately facing you across a shallow valley was a barren hill of no great elevation (of course it must be remembered we were here several thousand feet up). There was no sign of life or vegetation, and it looked so singularly bare and uninteresting that unless you had been told to look at it your attention would never have been attracted to it.

Yet this was the much talked of Col di Lana. Seen, however, through field glasses its aspect altered considerably, and you could not fail to notice what appeared to be row upon row of battered stone walls, and also that the ridge was very much broken up, shewing patches everywhere of red sand.

The " stone walls," the Colonel told us, were what remained of the Austrian trenches and the patches of sand were caused by the incessant bombardment by the Italians. At that moment there was not the slightest sign of military activity anywhere, no sound of a gun disturbed the still air.

It seemed incredible that we were gazing on the most redoubtable position on the whole Front, and one that for weeks had barred the Italian advance in this direction.

Someone remarked that it did not look so very formidable after all, and asked the Colonel if it would really mean a very big effort to capture it.

" To take that innocent looking summit now,"

he replied gravely, " would necessitate attacking it with a couple of hundred thousand men and being prepared to lose half of them. We shall get it by other means, but it will take some time ; meanwhile every yard of it is covered by my batteries."

We continued to gaze on the silent landscape with increasing interest, when suddenly, as though an idea had occurred to him, the Colonel said that if we did not mind waiting twenty minutes or so he would show us what his gunners could do. Of course we asked for nothing better. So he went up to the telephone cabin and was there a little while ; he then came back and told us to follow him.

He led the way down a ravine enclosed by lofty cliffs close by. At the foot of it were large boulders, some with sandbags spread on them. This was his sharpshooter's lair, he informed us, but for the moment they were not there.

We were then told to hide ourselves as much as possible behind the rocks and watch what was going to happen on the Col di Lana, which was in full view from here.

" We are right under fire here, but you are fairly safe if you keep well under cover," he added, as a sort of final recommendation when he saw us all placed.

The stillness of death reigned for the next ten minutes perhaps. We kept our eyes glued on the fateful hill opposite, not exactly knowing what was going to happen, when all of a sudden there was the crash of a big gun and we heard the shriek of a shell as it passed overhead ; then, with scarcely an interval this was followed up by such a succession of firing that it sounded like a thunderstorm let loose.

The effect on the Col di Lana was startling : it was as though a series of volcanoes had started activity, all along the summit and just below it fantastic columns of smoke and dust rose high into

he air. As the Colonel had truly said, every yard of the hill was under the fire of his batteries.

It was an object lesson in precision of aim, and one almost felt sorry for the men who were thus, without the slightest warning, deluged with high explosives. Meanwhile the Austrian batteries did not fire a shot in reply.

The bombardment lasted exactly ten minutes, and ceased as abruptly as it had started.

"Wonderful," we all exclaimed when we were reassembled at the station. The Colonel looked delighted with the way his instructions had been carried out.

At that moment we heard the telephone bell ringing violently; he excused himself and hurried to the box, and was there some minutes. When he returned the look of elation on his face had disappeared.

"That was the General ringing up," he explained. "He heard the firing and wanted to know what had happened suddenly. He is in an awful rage at my giving you this entertainment."

Of course we were all very sorry that he should have got into trouble on our account, but he seemed to make light of it, and evidently had no fear of unpleasant consequences. We then left the place and retraced our footsteps.

There was no mule-riding going down the mountain unless you wanted to break your neck. It was far too steep, therefore we had to walk the whole way, a very long and tiring job.

In the valley below was the village of Caprile, where we had arranged to meet our cars. A mountain stream ran past the village, and there was a broad, open space of ground facing the houses, in which was a large encampment with long sheds and hundreds of horses and mules picketted.

As we were walking across to the inn, where we

were going to lunch, we heard the dull boom of a gun in the distance, and in a few seconds the approaching wail of a projectile, followed by the report of the explosion a short distance away, and we saw the shell had burst on the hillside a few feet from the Red Cross Hospital.

We had been remarking how quietly the Austrians had taken our artillery attack. This was evidently the commencement of their reply.

The report had scarcely died away than there was a general scurrying of everyone for shelter ; mules and horses were rapidly released and hurriedly led away. Then another report was heard in the distance.

This time there was no doubt we were in for a regular bombardment. So with one accord we all made for a low parapet skirting the river, which would afford some cover, and without stopping to look what was behind it, leaped over like two-year-olds just as another shell burst in the open close by.

I don't think I am ever likely to forget where we found ourselves : below the parapet was the village muck-heap, and we were in the very midst of it. Unsavoury though the recollection is, it makes me smile when I recall it and the look on the faces of everyone who had taken refuge there.

If there was any luck as to position I perhaps, with two others, had the best of it, for we were only in manure and rotten straw, though we were in it up to our waists.

So soon as the report of the guns reached us we all listened intently till we heard the approaching shell, then crouched down as low as possible in the filth, and waited till the explosion was over. I remember I found myself thinking at these moments that it could not have been worse out in the open.

After some minutes in this unpleasant predicament there was a lull in the firing, so a dash was made for

the village, and in company with a crowd of soldiers we took refuge behind a house.

Whilst there we witnessed a fine example of coolness. A white-moustached old Colonel, a splendid looking fellow, kept pacing up and down out in the open regardless of the bursting shells, in order to make sure all his men were keeping under cover, and worked himself quite into a rage because some of them would persist in exposing themselves.

The bombardment only lasted about an hour, and then gradually died out. As far as I could ascertain, no one was killed, and no great damage done, but several animals were wounded ; one, a mule, was badly injured in the side, and the way the ambulance men gave it a sort of temporary dressing was quite curious, and showed much resource on their part. They fastened up the gaping wound with ordinary safety pins, using nearly a dozen for the purpose, whilst soldiers held on the animal's tail and fore leg to prevent its taking objection to the treatment.

A very useful-looking Nordenfeldt quick-firer mounted on the fore-deck (*see page* 77)

CHAPTER X

BELLUNO—Venadoro in the heart of the Dolomites—A fine hotel—Tame excursions—Visit to Cortina d'Ampezzo—Austrian attempts to recapture it—305mm. guns on the Schluderbach—Long range bombardment—Austrian women and children in the town—Italians capture Monte Cristallo—Aeroplanes and observation balloons impossible here—Tofana in hands of Italians—Serenity of garrison—Cortina d'Ampezzo—General invites us to a *déjeuner*—Living at Venadoro—Delightful *camaraderie*—Evenings in the big saloon—From Belluno to Gemona—Description of Front in this Sector—Our excursion to Pal Grande—The road—On mules up the mountain—A warning—Rough track—Peasant women carrying barbed wire up to the trenches—Pay of the women—Much competition for "vacancies"—The climb from Pal Piccolo to Pal Grande—A wonderful old man—"Some" climb—The entrenched position on Pal Grande—Spice of danger—Violent artillery duel—The noise of the passing shells—Magnificent view—Timau—The Freikoffel—Its capture by the *Alpini*—Wounded lowered by ropes—Capture of Pal Grande—Presence of mind of a doctor—A telling incident—Extraordinary enthusiasm of the troops—Food convoys—The soldier's *menu*—Daily rations—*Rancio*; the *plat du jour*—Officers mess arrangements—An *al fresco* lunch on Pal Grande—The "mess room"—"Pot Luck"—A wonderful meal—A stroll round

the position—An improvised bowling-alley—Use is second nature—In the trenches—A veteran warrior—The pet of the position—Gemona—The list of lodgings—My landlady—Good restaurants in Gemona—The *Alpini* quartered there—The military tatoo in the evenings—Reception by the Mayor—A delightful week.

CHAPTER X

THE military authorities had arranged for the correspondents and the staff of the censorship to be quartered in the big modern hydropathic establishment and hotel in the heart of the Dolomites, known as Venadoro, some eight kilometres from Belluno, and we remained there ten days, making frequent visits to the Front of this sector and into Austrian territory.

Although these excursions were extremely interesting many of them were very tame, and there were days when we did not hear a gun fired. This though of course disappointing, was quite comprehensible. Important operations were being carried out everywhere, but these did not of necessity entail daily conflict.

We happened to visit Cortina d'Ampezzo, for instance, at a moment when its aspect was so peaceful that the war seemed to have given it the go-by ; yet the guns were only silent by accident, as it were, for the Italian offensive was being pursued without intermission, and only a short distance from here fighting was taking place night and day. It was, therefore, somewhat difficult to realize from its tranquility the enormous importance attaching to this picturesque little Alpine township.

Its loss had been a terrible blow to Austrian pride, and several efforts had been made to recapture it, but as these had failed they had endeavoured to destroy it and thus prevent the Italians from profiting by its possession.

With this object in view, so typical of Hun methods, they had succeeded in placing several 305 mm. guns on the heights along the Schluderbach

valley, from which they could bombard Cortina d'Ampezzo at long range, and had already done so on one or two occasions, but, fortunately, without causing any loss of life or doing much damage.

The hellishness of this procedure will be more fully grasped when it is remembered that the majority of the inhabitants were only women and children, and mostly Austrians at that.

The continued successes of the Italians, and the rapidity of their advance was, however, gradually but irresistibly pressing the Austrians back, and it was expected that within a very short while Cortina d'Ampezzo would be freed from the menace of the big projectiles.

With dogged courage and endurance which could not be surpassed by any troops in the world, the Italians stormed Monte Cristallo, 10,600 feet high, thus capturing a position which commands the valley of Schluderbach, and forcing the enemy to retreat towards Colfreddo and Croda-Rosso (Hohe Gaisl), some ten kilometres to the north, where new defensive works were being hastily improvised.

In this mountain warfare where it is impossible to make use of aeroplanes and observation balloons owing to the configuration of the country, it is obvious that the initial operations are mainly directed towards gaining positions which can be utilized for the purposes of watching the movements of the enemy and directing artillery fire.

In this respect the Italians have scored all along the line, for the superior skill of their artillery men is incontestable, apart from which the quality of their ammunition appears to be far ahead of anything the Austrians have been using.

At the time of our visit all the heights encircling the Cortina Valley were already in the hands of the Italians, including Tofana, 10,700 feet high, which dominates the Eastern end of the Falzarrego Pass,

and is in a way a factor in the operations against the Col-di Lana on the other side. So that the chances of the Austrians ever recapturing Cortina d'Ampezzo are absolutely nil.

That the serenity of its garrison is in no way disturbed by an occasional visit from a long range shell was pleasingly evidenced by the General inviting us all to a *déjeuner* at one of the big hotels which was still open. It could not have been better served or more copious in peace time.

Our comparatively long stay at Venadoro was not without its compensations, in spite of the fact that there was little to be seen on the neighbouring Front.

We were all living together in a well-appointed hotel, so it afforded an opportunity of getting to know and appreciate each other in a way that never occurred in the other places we stopped at, where everyone was on his own, so to speak, and when you scarcely met, except by chance for a few moments at the Censorship.

Here, at Venadoro, Italian, French and English fraternised in a delightful spirit of healthy *camaraderie* and although we all shut ourselves up in our rooms during the daytime when we were not on an excursion, in order to get on with our work undisturbed, we all met for lunch, and the evenings after dinner saw us united in the big saloon, where with music, billiards, and bridge the time passed very cheerily.

Knowing the wonderful organization of the Italian Headquarters Staff, I was sometimes tempted to wonder whether the assembly of the Allied correspondents at Venadoro was not something more than a mere casual arrangement for the convenience of the Censorship.

Whatever was missing in the shape of military spectacle on the Belluno Front was amply made up for by what we were able to see at the next stage of

our journey, the little town of Gemona. From here we made what was undoubtedly the most interesting of all our excursions.

The Front on this sector is in the Upper But mountain group on the Frontier, which comprises Monte Timau, Montecroce, the Freikoffel, Pal Grande and Pal Piccolo—every one of them a position of first class importance, and the scene of desperate fighting and deeds of valour probably unsurpassed in the annals of mountain warfare.

Our road lay through Venzone, Tolmezzo and Paluzza, and there was sufficient military movement all the way to prove we were in a zone of active military operations, even if the booming of the guns in the distance had not borne this out.

A little beyond Paluzza, just outside the village of Muse, we found mules waiting for us, and we commenced a long, steep ascent which was to land us at the foot of Pal Piccolo, beyond which point the climb had to be made on foot. We were quite a small party, mostly English I may add.

About half way up we arrived at a hut where we were met by the Colonel of the Artillery, who courteously explained the nature and scope of the operations, concluding by warning us that we were going up at our own risk, as the whole of this particular sector was constantly under fire.

It had been but the merest pretence at a road so far, but beyond there it became but little better than a rough goat track, and terribly trying for our animals.

On one of the worst portions we passed a gang of peasant women carrying barbed wire up to the trenches. I knew that everybody in the war zone is doing his or her bit, but I must confess I was somewhat surprised to see women engaged on so arduous a task as this, which calls for unusual muscle and nerve, apart from an exceptionally

hardy physique. This will be realised when one learns that each of these apparently insignificant coils of barbed wire weighs close on fifty pounds dead weight.

When we passed this convoy, although it was high up in the mountains, and the women must have been tramping for some hours, they were all as cheerful as possible, and appeared to regard their job as a sort of pleasure jaunt. Considering also that the big guns were thundering close by and shells bursting in somewhat close proximity, it was a good example of use being second nature.

Girls as well as women are employed. They are paid two lires a day and their food is provided. It is a condition that they must come from the villages round about the sector in which they are employed, and there is, I learn, always keen competition for any " vacancies."

Many of the girls I saw were distinctly good-looking, and the bright tones of their picturesque costumes made a cheerful and unexpected note of colour against the dull grey of the wild mountain pass.

At the foot of Pal Piccolo our party divided. It looked like a terrific climb up to the summit of Pal Grande, and most of the men thought " it wasn't good enough," and decided to explore the lesser peak only. Five of us, including myself, went on: Jeffries, Bedolo, Molinari, another Italian whose name I forget for the moment, and, of course one or two officers.

I am sorry I cannot recall the name of the other Italian correspondent, as he was a perfect wonder. Although quite an old man—he was close on seventy if he was a day—he was certainly the coolest and most unconcerned of the party.

The stiff climb did not appear to trouble him in the least, nor did the bursting shells. He simply

strolled up ahead of us all as though he was taking a constitutional, with his hands in his pockets, disdaining the assistance of an alpenstock. Dressed in an ordinary tweed suit, and wearing a straw hat, his appearance was singularly out of keeping with the surroundings. His nonchalance was positively irritating, and he reached the top without turning a hair.

It was indeed " some " climb, though fortunately for me there were no hair-raising bits to bring on mountain vertigo. It meant simply plodding up and up amongst loose boulders at an angle of 75 degrees.

But if there were no perilous edges of precipices to negotiate, it was none the less nerve-racking, as we were under shell fire more or less the whole way, and many of the projectiles, which were of heavy calibre, burst in unpleasant proximity to the track we were mounting.

The last bit up into the trenches had to be done at the double, and crouching down, as we were here in full view of the Austrian lines, and snipers were constantly at work. Once inside the sand-bag ramparts we were in comparative security.

The entrenched position on Pal Grande was undoubtedly the most interesting and impressive of all we had visited so far, and amply repaid one for the tiring climb to get to it. Perhaps the contrast it presented to the somewhat tame excursions we had previously made had something to do with this impression, but it is certain that here we were in the very midst of the " real thing," and were sharing the same perils as the officers and soldiers around us.

It was the spice of ever-present danger that gave, as it were, an extra zest to being there, and made one the more appreciate all one saw. The Austrian artillery was firing continuously over us, and there was an incessant fusilade from their trenches, which were not more than a couple of hundred yards away

—so close in fact that you could have plainly seen the men in them had they shewn themselves.

The difference between this entrenched position in the mountains and others we had been into was very great ; in fact, it struck me as being unlike anything I had seen elsewhere.

Here the enemy's trenches were below us, and we were midway between the Austrian and Italian batteries, so that in the violent artillery duel which was going on all the time we were on Pal Grande the projectiles were passing overhead continuously, with a noise reminding one of a big railway junction with an endless succession of express trains going by.

Of course all the shells did not pass over us, but exploded round about on the mountain side, too near in several instances to be pleasant, especially when their objective appeared to be the direction in which we had come up.

At times, in fact, one began to wonder if it would not be too " hot " for us to get back that day, and that a big attack was developing. Fortunately, the Austrian gunners did not know how close to the Italian position they were dropping their shells, as they were only firing blindly in our direction.

The view one got from here was magnificent. Towering above us on our right, as we faced the Frontier, was Timau, nearly 10,000 feet high ; in the near distance, and just behind it, across the Frontier was Avostaunis, only slightly less in height.

Almost facing us to the left were the precipitous slopes of the Freikoffel, which the Alpini had captured at the point of the bayonet, and under the fire of the Austrian guns a short time previously.

How mortal man could be found to scale these giddy heights at all, leave alone under such awful conditions, baffles me. There are no tracks at all to ascend by it, so it is a mystery how it was accomplished.

The Austrians abandoned all their positions here so precipitately that they left their wounded behind, who, together with those of the Italians, had to be actually lowered by ropes from the summit, there being no other means of bringing them down to the ambulances.

Pal Grande had been the scene of several sanguinary fights before its final capture by the Italians not long before our visit to it; at one moment, in fact, the Austrians looked like retaking it, so desperate and reckless was the counter attack. It is said that had it not been for the presence of mind and initiative of one of the military doctors it was practically lost.

He was attending the wounded in a temporary ambulance station at the back of the firing line when he realised the danger of the situation. Men and officers were falling all along the line, and it was imperative that their places should be immediately occupied if the position was to be held. On the spur of the moment it occurred to him to call on the least wounded of the men he was looking after to try and help.

Explaining to them how critical was the situation, and also what was likely to happen to them if the Austrians recaptured the place, he stirred up such excitement and ardour that, regardless for the moment of the pain they were suffering from their wounds, those that were able sprang to their feet and returned to the trenches where, seizing the rifles of their fallen comrades, they managed to continue to defend the position till reinforcements arrived.

If there was one thing more than another that struck me whilst amongst the troops in the mountains, it was the extraordinary enthusiasm displayed everywhere, even here in this bleak and exposed position; the *moral* of the men was incomparable,

and they seemed to be blessed with an inexhaustible stock of good humour and the power of taking things cheerfully. It was indeed impossible to mix with them and not feel the influence of their youthful eagerness and their confidence in ultimate victory.

Napoleon's well known aphorism that an army fights on its belly is well borne out in the Italian Army ; and even on these lofty peaks the soldier, whatever he may have to endure in the shape of inevitable hardship, never suffers from want of food and well-cooked meals.

The food convoys make their journeys with unfailing regularity, for there must be no hitch in the commissariat arrangements—and it is safe to assert that there is not a single soldier, no matter how isolated he may be, who does not receive every day his regulation allowance of 400 grammes of meat (about half a pound), a kilo and a half of bread, macaroni or polenta, coffee, tobacco, and half a litre of wine.

Of course the menu is not very varied, but neither is the national Italian cuisine at any time. *Rancio*, a soup-like stew, made of meat and macaroni or some similar *pasta*, with a sufficiency of good, wholesome bread and a drink of red wine, should be sufficient to satisfy the appetite of any soldier.

I made a meal of *rancio* on many occasions after a long and cold motor run, and always found it so appetising and comforting that I wished I could have got it every day. This stew is the usual *plat du jour* of the Italian soldier as is the *stchi* in the Russian Army, and is always served out steaming hot.

In advanced trenches, outposts or similar exposed positions, where culinary operations are, of course, impossible, the *rancio* is taken to the men after dark in special receptacles for keeping it hot, known as *Cassette di Cottura*, which are constructed on the Thermos principle. The men would indeed begin

to think things were going badly if the " food party " could not succeed in reaching them.

So far as the officers are concerned, these mess arrangements, when up in the fighting line, of course, depend largely on circumstances, though these do not seem to be always governed by the difficulty of access to the position or its remoteness from the base.

I had a pleasant proof of this at Pal Grande. The officers hospitably insisted on our taking " pot luck " with them, as they were just going to have lunch, and it turned out one of the best *al fresco* repasts I have ever sat down to.

The " mess-room " was a well-protected dug-out which had been fitted up in somewhat similar fashion to a settler's hut in the Far West ; it was quite snug, in fact, and we were a merry party crowded round the table that occupied nearly the whole of the interior, in spite of the continuous booming of the guns and the screech of the shells overhead.

I had quite expected to get the roughest of meals in the circumstances ; imagine, therefore, my surprise when we started with a fine macaroni soup ; this was followed by beef steaks and fried potatoes ; then came a jam omelette, and we finished up with cheese and fruit, the whole being washed down with excellent Verona wine. Black coffee was then brought in, and one of our hosts produced a bottle of cognac and a box of cigars.

You could not have wished for a more delightful meal : it made one feel that even life in an entrenchment 8,000 feet up has its compensations at times.

Of course it would not do to infer that in all positions the officers were able to indulge in so sumptuous a " pot luck " repast, but I gathered that whenever it is possible a mess is formed, a cook found from amongst the men, and meals served comfortably.

Before us stretched the broad valley of the Adige (*see page* 101)

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In outlying positions, where frequently everything is, so to speak, stagnant for weeks at a time, this messing arrangement goes a long way towards relieving the inevitable monotony and weariness of trench life and the strain on the nerves caused by the constant vigil.

After lunch we went out for a stroll round the position, passing on our way an improvised bowling alley, where a crowd of soldiers off duty were interestedly watching a match in progress. Had it not been for the sand-bag breastworks around us and the incessant noise of the guns, it would have been hard to realise that we were in one of the most exposed positions on this Front, and were actually under fire the whole time. That one can get accustomed to anything was exemplified here, as the officers and men were quite unperturbed by what was to them merely a daily contingency.

There was no heavy artillery on the Pal Grande when we were there ; only a few machine guns, as the place was for the moment but an entrenched outpost, which had to be constantly on the alert against a surprise attack from the enemy's lines below.

I had a walk along the trenches where the men were firing through the loopholes as unconcernedly as though at a shooting competition instead of having human beings for their target.

The Austrians were scarcely a hundred yards away in places, so it did not require to be an expert marksman to hit anything at that range ; but it was not often that anything shewed itself above the parapets, either on the Austrian or the Italian side ; still the men kept up a constant fusilade, for what reason I could not ascertain, except that perhaps it was to prove that no liberties were possible.

Whilst in the trenches I was introduced to two important characters of the position. One, a white-haired old veteran well over sixty years of age, who

was serving as a volunteer. A fearless, wiry old chap I was told, and who could hold his own even now with any individual Austrian if ever he had the opportunity.

The other character was the pet of the position, a jolly little fox terrier that had, I was told, gone through all the fighting, and had now the run of the place and was looked upon as a mascot by the officers and men ; in fact, there would be much perturbation if any harm came to it ; curiously enough this was the only occasion that I saw a dog in the trenches.

Gemona was a quaint little town, or rather big village, and the inhabitants were delighted to see us, and proved it by not overcharging in the least.

When we arrived and reported at the Censorship, which was established in the Town Hall, we were given a list of houses where lodgings could be obtained, with the prices affixed. This was a capital idea, and worked out admirably ; it saved a lot of time running about hunting for rooms, and as only those lodgings recommended by the Mayor were in the lists there was no risk of unpleasant surprises.

I got fixed up at a very nice house, and the landlady, a delightful old person, did her utmost to make me comfortable, as I used my room for a studio also. Considering she only charged one lire and a half a day it could not be considered excessive.

For our coffee in the morning we usually used to meet at a café ; for lunch and dinner there was no lack of choice, as curiously enough for so small a place, there were several really good restaurants.

There was a regiment of *Alpini* quartered there, a splendid body of men, giving one the impression of picked athletes all, and of an evening their band always gave a military tattoo, wet or fine, marching through the main streets with torches and finishing on the Place with a short concert. A very inspiriting

procedure, which considerably helped to liven us all up, and the more especially as this was the only place on the Front where we had heard military music.

The night before we left, the Mayor gave us a reception and *vin d'honneur*, which further helped to emphasise the good feeling which existed between us all. We had spent a delightful week in Gemona.

CHAPTER XI

GEMONA to Udine—Final stage of official journey—Regrets—Arrival at Udine—List of recommended lodgings—My room—My landlady an Austrian woman—I pay my respects to General Cafarelli—My friend Dr. Berthod—My old studio at the Agrario—The Isonzo Front—Many rumours—Off on our biggest trip; 245 kilometres in the car—Roads excellent and well-looked after—A great change—Cormons quite an Italian town—Same with other towns in conquered territory—Observatory on Monte Quarin—A splendid bird's-eye view—The plain of Friuli—Podgora—The Carso—The hum of aeroplanes—The Isonzo Sector—The immense difficulties—Received by the General—A pleasant *goûter*—Lieutenant Nathan, Ex-Mayor of Rome—The Subida lines of trenches—Explanation of Italian successes everywhere—Caporetto via Tolmino—A desolate region—Road along the Isonzo—The mighty limestone cliffs of Monte Nero—The great exploit of its capture recalled—One mountain road very much like another—Nothing to sketch—Perfect organization—The fog of dust—Caporetto—Not allowed to motor beyond—Important strategic operations—Monte Rombon—Difficult to locate Austrian guns—A glimpse of Plezzo—The situation here—Excursion to Gradisca via Palmanova, a semi-French town—Romans—Curious rearrangement of cars—Only two allowed proceed to Gradisca under fire—The Italian batteries at work—The deserted streets—The "observatory" room—The iron screens—View of Monte San Michele being bombarded—Stroll through the town—A big shell

—Excursion to Cervignano, Aquileia and Grado—Peaceful country-side—Grado the Austrian Ostend—Fish-lunch at a café—The town continually bombarded by aircraft—Arrival of Beaumont, the French airman—Conclusion of official tour of Front—No permission given for correspondents to remain—Success of tour—Comments on organization, etc.

CHAPTER XI

WE were now nearing the final stage of our official journey along the Front, as there only remained the Isonzo Sector to complete the scheduled tour.

Although I was looking forward to re-visiting Udine and seeing my friends there again, there was the feeling that the end of our sojourn amongst these cheery Italian soldiers was approaching, and the recollection of the decree that we were all to leave the war zone directly the tour was finished loomed up in one's mind as a sort of bugbear.

One would have liked to spend an indefinite time in these scenes of warlike activity ; there was so much to see, and we had really had so little time to see it in, and now, as we were getting into the " hang " of it all we had to think of leaving.

It was very irritating, and marred a good deal of the pleasant impression one had received during the tour. However, there was no help for it. We knew when we started that we were only invited on this understanding, so there was an end of it.

Udine is quite close to Gemona, so it only took a short time to motor there. On our arrival we found that following the example of the Mayor of Gemona, the Censorship had arranged for a list of recommended lodgings to be prepared for us.

I had at first intended returning to my old quarters at the Torra di Londra, but decided that it was perhaps better not, so took a room in the same house as my car-companions.

Strange to relate, this room was in a flat rented by a young and good-looking Austrian woman, a dressmaker, who was married to an Italian. She was, to a certain extent, under police surveillance, I was

told, but had not been interfered with otherwise. It struck me as a curious state of affairs, considering how strict were the police regulations with regard to foreigners, though there may have been some special motive in allowing an alien of her nationality to remain here unmolested.

Almost the first thing I did when I was settled was to go and pay my respects to General Cafarelli, the Military Governor of Udine, who, as may be remembered, had had me arrested and sent away to Florence some ten weeks previously. I sent in my card, and he received me very graciously for a man of his stern demeanour. He congratulated me on my altered circumstances, and we had almost a friendly chat anent the incident.

My friend, Dr. Berthod at the "Agrario," told me my studio was still at my disposal; other people I met seemed pleased to see me back, so I felt quite at home again in a very short time.

A very full programme had been arranged for the correspondents during their stay here; the Isonzo Front being very much to the fore at the moment, in the direction of Gorizia especially, and all sorts of rumours were in the air with regard to coming events in the near future.

If, as it is said, coming events cast their shadows before, how long those shadows must have been if one only had known, and how despondent everyone would have been if it could have been realised then how many months would have to elapse before the coming events so freely prophesied would materialise.

Although I already knew a good deal about the Friuli Sector, there had been so much progress since I had been away from Udine that most of what we were going to see would be new to me. Moreover, it was a very different proposition being permitted to visit it to going about furtively and under constant fear of arrest.

The Isonzo Front now extended over a very large area, and was a long way inside Austrian territory. Roughly speaking, from Tirnova, in the valley of the Isonzo, a few miles above Caporetto, to Monfalcone on the Adriatic.

We were only to remain a week in Udine, so in order to obtain even the most cursory impression, in the short time at our disposal, of what was taking place in this wide zone of operations, entailed some long motor journeys. This was evidently the plan of the authorities, as they allowed us to lose no time in making a start.

At 6 o'clock in the morning following on our arrival we were off on what turned out to be the biggest trip we had made hitherto, and when we got back in the evening we had covered no less than 245 kilometres in the car, and without a hitch or contretemps.

It spoke volumes for the excellent manner in which the roads in the war zone are looked after. Heavy as military traffic was, seemingly endless, everywhere one saw gangs of men at work making repairs, where the surface had got broken up.

The three months that had elapsed since I was first on this Front, had effected a great change, but nowhere was it more marked than on the road to and beyond Cormons. The redeemed territory had now so completely settled down that it was hard to realise one was on Austrian territory, or rather, what had been so short a time previously.

Cormons had become quite an Italian town, and a very busy one at that. And the same could be said of Cervignano, Civiedale, Brazzano, Terzo, and every village where the Italians had passed. An extremely valuable slice of whilom Italian territory had passed back to its old allegiance and with but little fighting. And no damage had been done to either the maize crop or the vines.

Our programme for the day's run was very comprehensive, and provided the car did not break down, we were certain to see much of absorbing interest.

Just beyond Cormons, on the summit of Mount Quarin, a wooded hill which dominates the town, and where an observatory had been established, you get a splendid bird's-eye view of the whole of this important section of the Front.

Spread out at our feet, as it were, was the vast fertile plain of Friuli, every yard of which appeared to be under cultivation. The straight outlines of the fields were fringed by trees and presented a curious doll's house and chequered appearance from this elevation.

On the far side of this plain, about four and a half miles distant from where we stood, were the hills enclosing the valley of the lower Isonzo, a curious succession of undulating ridges rising in places to a considerable height. There was a good deal of smoke and mist hanging about, and standing out in sharp relief against it was the peculiar hog-back contour of the blood-soaked ridge of Podgora bristling with the charred and shattered stumps of trees.

Even as we gazed, the distant boom of artillery reached our ears, and we saw shells bursting constantly along the summit and we knew that the attack which was costing so many gallant lives, was being vigorously pursued.

To the right of Podgora lay the Carso, and in the hollow between was Gorizia, the goal towards which all thoughts in Italy were then turned. Three eminences loomed up in the mist beyond : Monte Kuk, Monte Sabotino, and Monte Santo, the last-named being destined to play important rôles in the future. In the far distance, and only faintly distinguishable, towered the Mountains of Ternova.

The hum of aeroplanes was heard on all sides,

and cleverly concealed anti-aircraft guns started firing viciously from time to time, more, however, with the object of keeping the enemy planes up as high as possible, then hitting them, as they seemed to run little or no risk, judging from the serene manner they hovered around.

The conditions along the Isonzo Sector are practically the antithesis of those prevailing in the mountainous regions of the Cadorre, Trentino, and Carnia. Here the low foot hills and plains present opportunities for operations which remind one of those being carried out in Flanders and Northern France ; armoured trenches, of course, playing the principal part everywhere.

Every attempt, therefore, by General Cadorna at a forward move in this direction had to be backed up, as it were, by defensive as well as offensive precautions, with the result that the entire Front of this region presents a series of lines of entrenchments and barbed wire entanglements that are designed to afford an immediate protection should the advance fail, and a retirement prove necessary.

Prescience is evidently an innate characteristic of the Italian Generals of to-day, and I was continually noting it along the Front, but nowhere was it more impressed on me than in this particular area. Between Cormons and Brazzano, at a place called Subida, is a veritable masterpiece of military engineering work.

It consists of a vast series of elaborately constructed covered-in armoured trenches with protective wire entanglements, and would shelter several army corps at a pinch, though fortunately there has not been the slightest fear of their being requisitioned, and all the time and expense expended on them will, it is to be hoped, have been precautionary measures.

In years to come these miles of covered-in trenches

will doubtless prove of intense interest to the military student, and though they may not present the picturesque aspect of a Vauban fortification, they are certainly none the less impressive.

It is certain they will long remain as evidence of the determination and method with which Italy took her part in the great war.

All this, though only a side issue, serves further to convince you that in carrying out her part of the operations, she has undertaken everything in a thoroughly well-considered and skilful manner that cannot fail to have a very cogent bearing on the ultimate issue of the Allied policy of co-ordinated strategy.

Before continuing on our journey we were received most hospitably by the Divisional General.

In the garden of a fine old house, which he was using as his headquarters, an *al fresco*, stand-up *goûter* awaited us.

Tables had been placed under the trees on the lawn, and there were piles of dainty sandwiches, cakes and fruit, together with wines and tea, and coffee, cigars and cigarettes, all very acceptable considering how early we had started out.

Amongst the group of officers with the General was Lieutenant Nathan, the wonderfully popular ex-Mayor of Rome. I had heard so much of him that I seized the opportunity of introducing myself, and found him a very cheery and sympathetic personality, speaking English as fluently as a Cockney —so well, in fact, that it seemed strange to see him in the uniform of an Italian officer.

From Cormons we proceeded to Caporetto via Tolmino, and thence through the valley of the Isonzo, a desolate mountainous region, which had been the scene of desperate fighting in the early weeks of the war. Now it was relatively calm, and only once and again was the silence of nature

On one of the worst portions we passed a gang of peasant women carrying barbed wire up to the trenches (*see page* 118)

disturbed by the reverberation of a big gun in the distance.

The long-prepared defensive positions of the Austrians, of which one has heard so much, availed them naught against the strategy of Cadorna and the daring of his troops. One by one they were captured, and by attacking them from the very side where attack was least expected.

The principal explanation of the victorious advance of the Italians was undoubtedly that it was made from a direction where it was not looked for and which, therefore, quite upset the plans of the Austrian General.

Only the most reliable and enthusiastic of soldiers could have been asked for so determined an effort and such sacrifices as the advance in this region was bound to entail under any conditions, but without wavering it was undertaken and eagerly at that.

It was perhaps to a certain extent but a repetition of the tactics in the mountain warfare all along the Front, but it was so glorious that no excuse is necessary for again dilating upon it.

Through a pathless wilderness of shrub or bare precipitous rocks the men made their way forward unhesitatingly, cutting a roadway as they advanced, dragging the heavy artillery with them and consolidating each yard behind them with barbed wire entanglement and trench work in case the apparent weakness of the Austrian was but a ruse.

But there was no ruse, and nothing arrested the delirious rush of the Italians at the commencement of hostilities along the left bank of the Isonzo.

It was like an avalanche in its irresistibility, and the Austrians were completely nonplussed by such unusual military evolutions, with the result that three of their most important positions on the Front —Monte Nero, Tolmino and Plava—were already in the hands of the Italians before it was realised

how important was the movement in this direction.

The heroic feat of the capture of Monte Nero by the *Alpini* in the month of June I have already described. In spite of every endeavour to re-take it, the Austrians had not made a yard of progress since then, except in a retrogade direction.

The Italians had immediately fortified every position they had gained, and the chances of the enemy ever recapturing them were practically *nil*.

Our road passed by the scene of many heroic exploits. As we motored through the frowning ravine along a winding road which skirted the swiftly-flowing Isonzo, between Tolmino and Caporetto the mighty limestone cliffs of Monte Nero gradually came into view, its towering bulk illumined by the rays of the afternoon sun.

Unconsciously one's thoughts reverted to the events of the early days of the war, and you endeavoured to picture to yourself what had taken place hereabouts, the onward rush of the Italian troops, undeterred by the most terrible obstacles nature opposed to them, fording or swimming the treacherous river by night and scaling the heights on the opposite bank, and all this in the face of the Austrian fire.

You had an involuntary shudder as you gazed up at these gaunt rocks, where now an almost death-like silence reigned. You felt it must require the fanatic courage of a Dervish and to be cast in different mould to every-day mortals to have accomplished such exploits.

The road we were following was particularly interesting, inasmuch as it was in the immediate rear of the fighting line the whole way, and we were therefore, right in the midst of every description of military traffic and movement all the time.

It was quite remarkable considering this how little there was in the shape of incident to record, or

for the matter of that, to sketch either. Everything appeared to be so perfectly organized that it worked like a big well-oiled machine. It reminded me not a little of a road in China with its endless stream of human beings.

One mountain road is very much like another, and to me on the look-out for subjects for my sketch book, there was a very great sameness everywhere, except the dust, which was worse than I have seen it anywhere, even in South Africa. It could have given points to the densest London fog and won easily. The big military motor *Camions*, raised such clouds of it that progress at times was almost impossible.

You could scarcely see a yard ahead, and where you knew that the roadway ended abruptly on one side, it was not altogether pleasant to reflect that your safety depended solely on the skill or luck of your chauffeur—a spec of grit in his eye, a momentary lapse of " nerve," and you might find yourself in " Kingdom Come." In fact, it always struck me that the risk you ran from shell-fire was infinitesimal as compared with that of motoring on these mountain roads.

We were only permitted to go a little way beyond Caporetto, the General having given instructions that he did not desire any motor traffic further along the road as it might interfere with his " arrangements."

As we were quite exposed to the Austrian batteries this appeared reasonable enough, so, accompanied by a very amiable and learned Staff Officer as guide we ascended a hill close by from which we were able to gain some idea of what was going on.

Facing us were being carried out the most important strategic operations on the whole of the Italian Front.

We were looking up the valley of the Isonzo River, here somewhat narrowed ; the stream, from the

height where we were standing, looking like a dark blue ribbon laid across white gravel.

Precipitous mountains rose abruptly from either side of the valley, and towering above all was Monte Rombon, 10,000 feet high, at the very summit of which the Austrians had their most strongly fortified position in the Front.

This position was the key of the Austrian defences in the sector, and to capture it the Italians, at the time of our visit, were putting out every effort.

It was already completely invested, and the Italians were bombarding it with heavy artillery, placed on Mount Svinjak opposite.

We could see the shells bursting high up on the precipitous slopes of the mountain. The report of the guns echoed and re-echoed grandly, but the tiny puffs of smoke looked ridiculously insignificant in comparison to the volume of sound.

The difficulty for the Italian artillery was, we learned, to locate the emplacement of the Austrian guns, as they were hidden in caves and all manner of unwonted places on the mountain side. Still, they were gradually being discovered and silenced, and at any moment the *Alpini* might be called upon to try and repeat their previous deeds of valour by scaling the mountain and capturing the position *a l'arme blanche*. Meanwhile the artillery duel between Rombon and Svenjak proceeded without intermission.

At the foot of the mountains, in the valley on the right bank of the Isonzo, at its junction with the Koritnica, one could just distinguish the first house of the town of Plezzo and its fortress. Through one's glasses you saw that little but ruins now remained of what had been one of the most picturesque and prosperous towns in the Carniola.

Plezzo was now but a sort of " no man's land," and though practically in the possession of the Italians,

was for the moment uninhabitable, being directly under the fire of the guns of Monte Rombon. The Austrians, with their customary " kultured " amenity were continually bombarding it in order to prevent the Italians from installing themselves there, with the result that the town was slowly but surely being wiped out of existence.

As a matter of fact, at that time it would have been impossible for the Italians to have attempted, except at very heavy and needless sacrifices of life, any thing but a "Moral" occupation of Plezzo, as although the Austrians had evacuated the town they were very strongly fortified and entrenched on several of the surrounding eminences.

The whole situation here at the moment, however, was, so far as one could gather, dependent on the success of operations being carried out in the direction of Tolmino. So that it could be safely left to work itself out here, and there appeared to be no doubt whatever from what we learned that everything was developing as satisfactorily as possible. We then returned to Udine via Savogna and Cividale.

Another excursion we made to Gradisca was also particularly interesting, and very exciting as well.

Gradisca, at that time, had only recently been abandoned by the Austrians, and a somewhat similar state of affairs existed there as in Plezzo. That is, it was continually under fire from the Austrian batteries on the Carso, and many houses had already been destroyed. There was, however, this difference, that there were soldiers in the town, not many, perhaps, but sufficient for it to be considered " occupied."

It is only a short run of about 30 kilometres from Udine. En route we drove through Palmanova, a delightful old semi-French town, dating from the time of Napoleon I, and which reminded me a little

of Vitry-le-Francois. Its star-shaped setting of old ramparts with moat and drawbridge and archways entrance, with big doors, presented a strange contrast to the up-to-date military traffic passing through.

A little beyond Palmanova, at a village named Romans, we were informed that all the cars could not be allowed to go to Gradisca, which was some-three kilometres further on, as the road was under fire, and a procession of half-a-dozen vehicles would attract still more attention from the Austrian batteries.

It was proposed, therefore, that we should all squeeze into two of the biggest cars and make a dash along the road, with an interval of twenty minutes between us. It was an uncomfortably tight fit, as may be imagined, and we were packed like sardines. The car I was in, a very high-powered one, surely did those three kilometres in record time. I never motored at such a speed before.

As we neared Gradisca the shells began bursting with unpleasant frequency in the fields, quite close to the road, and I feel sure that everyone experienced a sense of relief when we reached the shelter presented by the first house.

The town, which was not very much damaged, was typically Austrian, and in the bright sunshine looked a very pretty and quaint little place. There was a nice park with fine old trees, and in the centre was a bandstand, so it was evidently a pleasant place in pre-war time, but now it was absolutely deserted, and the streets presented a very forlorn and ghostly appearance, which was heightened by the fact of all the shutters of the houses being closed and grass growing in the roadways everywhere.

There were Italian batteries on the hills just outside, and they were firing continuously and with a

regularity which almost savoured of clockwork. The Austrians were only replying in a desultory manner.

The report of the guns, and the shriek of the projectiles passing overhead, echoed through the empty streets with weird effect. It is difficult to describe the uncanny feeling all this produced on one : it was as though you were walking in a dream, but the reality of it all was soon brought home to you when a shell burst amongst the houses.

An officer conducted us into the centre of the town, through an archway and up to the first floor of an old building. Here a large room, with three windows, was used as a sort of observatory-post, as it directly faced the Austrian lines about fifteen hundred yards away on M. St. Michael.

The sashes of the windows had been removed, and big panels of sheet iron, painted black, were propped up in front of the openings, so that one could get a sideways glimpse outside without exposing one's self to view.

The room was bare of furniture, with the exception of some armchairs, placed where one could sit comfortably and observe at one's ease what was going on. There would have been almost a touch of the theatrical in it all had it not been for the occasional ping of bullets striking the iron screens.

One got a remarkable view of this much talked about corner of the Carso, for the possession of which the Italians were staking so much.

We saw the shells bursting with mechanical precision, and in endless succession, along the summit, which was being gradually pounded to bits.

Through your binoculars you searched in vain for some sign of life or man's handiwork on the desolate ridge, and it was difficult to realize the importance attached to it. Yet it was certain that the enemy was concealed there, and in great strength

otherwise this incessant and methodical bombardment would not have been deemed necessary.

We had a bit of a stroll round on our way back to the car, and found that, considering the town was midway between the Italian and Austrian batteries, remarkably little damage had been done. What struck me as particularly interesting was that many of the heavy calibre Austrian shells had failed to explode.

There was a huge one I was shown that had wrecked a small house simply by its weight alone. It was lying on the ground amongst a heap of debris, quite unimpaired except for a few small scratches. If it had exploded it would probably have destroyed half the side of the street. One had heard so many rumours of the deterioration in the quality of the Austrian projectiles that you wondered whether this was a proof of it.

The visit to Gradisca practically concluded our tour of the fighting Fronts. We made another excursion to Cervignano Aquileia and Grado, but this was practically outside the range of military operations, so it was more in the nature of a pleasure trip than anything else. Still it helped to convey a good idea of what had already been accomplished in the conquered area.

Cervignano, a rather large and important town, was full of troops, but I learned that these were only " resting " there after a long spell of the trenches.

It looked a very pleasant place to " rest " in, and, judging from the cheery looks of the men, they thoroughly appreciated the change, though it was not always peace and quietude even here, as Austrian aircraft had a nasty habit of paying unexpected visits every now and then, I was told. Several women and children had already been killed by aeroplane bombs and a few houses damaged.

Aquileia, the ancient capital of Venetia, was

only interesting from an archæological point of view, as it presented no military features.

A learned officer showed us over the museum and the fine church, with its Roman pavement, and both were, doubtless, interesting and instructive from a student point of view, *mais ce n'etait pas la guerre*. I loathe sightseeing, but I suppose it would have been sacrilege if we had missed seeing them since we were there.

From Aquilei we had a pleasant motor run through a peaceful countryside to Belvedere, a tiny "port" at the head of the Adriatic, where we embarked on a Government launch for Grado, which is situated on an island a couple of miles away.

There was not a sign of warfare here. It was a little seaside town, which reminded somewhat of Blankenbergh, but the place was well worth seeing, as it has been called the Austrian Ostend, and the Casino was its principal attraction during the season.

Of course all the hotels and the bathing establishments were closed, but we were able to get an excellent fish luncheon at a café facing the quay.

The town was continually being subjected to bombardment by Austrian seaplanes operating from Trieste, some twenty miles distant.

Many people, chiefly women and children, had been killed and a number of houses destroyed. Energetic measures were being adopted for the defence of the town, and whilst we were there a seaplane, with Beaumont, the famous French airman as passenger, arrived from Venice.

Our excursion to Grado concluded the official tour of the Front, and much to the regret of us all, we had to make our preparations for leaving the war zone; three days were given us to complete any work we might have in hand and get it passed by the Censor.

It is almost needless to add that every effort was made by us to obtain permission to remain for a time, if only in Udine, but in vain—for reasons best known to those in authority, no further publicity was desired for the moment.

With the conclusion, therefore, of the correspondents' tour along the Front, the veil of secrecy was once more drawn over the operations, and was not to be lifted again except for the issue of the brief "Official" *communiqués* till such time as it might be decided to allow representatives of the Press to return to the war zone.

That the tour had been a great success was incontrovertible. The good fellowship shown to the foreign correspondents everywhere was quite one of its most memorable features, and one was continually experiencing it in some form or other.

Although perhaps, in consequence of the operations being in a state of preparation only, we had not seen so much of active warfare as we should have wished; what we had seen had opened our eyes to the resource and courage of the Italian officers and soldiers and the marvellous organization of the Army.

The progress that was being made in every part of the Front was, in my opinion, convincing proof that Italy's share in the Allied operations is likely to be a very important factor in every phase of the conflict, and subsequent events have strengthened my conviction.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION of Correspondents' tour of Front—I return to London—Awaiting events—Brief official *communiqués*—Half Austrian Army held up on Italian Front — Harrying tactics — Trench warfare during the winter — Recuperative powers of the Austrians—Gorizia a veritable Verdun — Italian occupation of Austrian territory—Many thousand square miles conquered—A bolt from the blue—Serious development—Awakening Austrian activity—400,000 troops in the Trentino—Front from Lake Garda to Val Sugana ablaze—Totally unforseen onslaught—Towns and villages captured—Genius of Cadorna—Menace of invasion ended—I go and see Charles Ingram with reference going back to Italy—His journalistic acumen—My marching orders—Telegram from Rome—My journey back to Italy—Confidence everywhere—Milan in darkness—Improvement on the railway to Udine—Udine much changed—Stolid business air — Changes at the Censorship — Press Bureau and club for correspondents—The Censorship staff—Few accredited correspondents—Remarkable absence of Entente correspondents—Badges and passes—Complete freedom of action given me—I start for Vicenza en route for Arsiero—Scenes on road—From daylight into darkness—Hun methods of frightfulness—Arsiero—Its unfavourable position—Extent of the Austrian advance—Rush of the Italians—Austrians not yet beaten—Town damaged by the fire and bombardment—Villa of a great writer—Rossi's paper mills—The town itself—The battlefield—Dèbris of war—A dangerous souvenir for my studio.

One would have liked to spend an indefinite time at these scenes of warlike activity (*see page* 131)

CHAPTER XII

THERE were rumours that within a very short time the correspondents would be permitted to return to the Front, but it was very uncertain when this would be, so I decided, since we all had to leave the war zone, to return for the time being to London where I could find better employment in my studio, than playing the tourist in Italy.

For several months, however, no permission was given, and during this time, owing to the fact that there were no correspondents with the Army, little or nothing was known of what was taking place ; the brief official *communiqués* conveying but the most meagre details.

That the Italians were marking time meanwhile was, however, in the last degree improbable, of that I felt convinced ; General Cadorna is not made of that fibre. When he is apparently doing nothing of importance it is certain he is preparing some *coup* and waiting a favourable opportunity to develope it.

In the meantime practically half the Austrian Army and the pick of the troops at that was being held up on the Italian Front, and not in a state of immobility by any means ; one was able to judge if one read between the lines of the *Communiqués* that day by day almost, and all through the winter, harrying tactics were being successfully carried on all along the Front. So much so, in fact, that the Austrian Generals must have often found themselves in a quandary for satisfactory matter for their daily reports.

The winter passed with ding-dong trench warfare,

when the rate of progress could at times be only reckoned by yards in a week. Still, it was progress, and every yard was bringing the Italians nearer to their immediate objective, Gorizia.

Meanwhile the extraordinary and quite unexpected recuperative power of the Austrians was becoming more and more *en evidence* as was also the fact, unfortunately demonstrated by the heavy losses of the Italians, that they were putting up a desperate fight.

Gorizia had proved a veritable Verdun. Every hill and bluff being found to be fortified and honeycombed with deep entrenchments, which would have entailed enormous sacrifice of life to capture at this stage of the operations.

It looked, therefore, like taking months to accomplish what the Italians had fondly hoped would be but an affair of weeks, though considering the unforseen difficulties that had to be overcome, it redounded to the credit of General Cadorna and his lieutenants that so much could be recorded as actually compassed.

The occupation of two thousand square miles of Austrian territory with a population of over 300,000, was an achievement which in itself was sufficient answer to those captious stay-at-home arm-chair critics who were continually asking " What is Italy doing ? "

Then suddenly—as a bolt from the blue—something totally unexpected happened, and developed into a crisis of so serious a nature that it called for the exercise of all the genius and resource of Cadorna, combined with the devotion of his troops, to master, and which might conceivably have altered the whole outlook of the war had it not been successfully handled.

On the 15th May the Italian *communiqué*, to the surprise of most of us, who followed with interest

the fighting on this front, announced that on the previous day the Austrians had started a heavy bombardment on the positions on the Trentino Front near Roveretto which the Italians were expecting to capture at any moment.

This piece of news, after months of comparative quiescence, was sufficiently startling to attract immediate attention to the Italian Front, and the London papers actually began to mention Italy again.

The *communiqués* of the following days stated that the activity of the Austrian batteries continued, but gave no suggestion of anything untoward happening, so it was generally thought that the first intimation was perhaps somewhat exaggerated, and that there was " nothing much in it."

But this sudden awakening of activity was, as it turned out, the first rumbling of the approaching storm, and, instead of dying out, as had previous artillery demonstrations, it gradually increased in intensity, until May 23rd, the anniversary of the declaration of war, when the burst came.

It was then discovered that the Austrians had concentrated no less than 400,000 troops in the Trentino sector at a point where they were protected by a series of powerful forts. This particular sector had all along been recognized as the weakest point on the Italian Front, but as there had been no indication of an offensive impending in this direction no steps had been taken to meet it.

In a few hours the 50 mile front from the Lake Garda to Val Sugana was ablaze, and the Italians were defending themselves for all they were worth against a heavy and determined Austrian thrust that tried their endurance to the utmost limit.

So totally unforseen was the onslaught that although the Italian wings on the Brenta and the Adige held firm, the centre was practically crumpled

up by sheer weight of numbers, and the Austrians advanced victoriously into Italian territory. The towns of Arsiero, and Asiago, and many villages were captured, and it looked for a short time as if the plains of Venetia lay at the mercy of the invaders.

The genius and resource of General Cadorna saved the situation.

Brigades of infantry were hurried up to the threatened area in motor lorries and other vehicles, together with guns and huge quantities of ammunition. In incredibly short time an army of nearly 100,000 men were on the spot. The Italian line was consolidated and a counter-offensive begun.

Within four days the Italians had recovered the whole of the lost positions, including Arsiero and Asiago, and the menace of invasion was ended.

For some time previously I had been in daily expectation of receiving my marching orders to go back to Italy, and at the height of the crisis I went down to see Charles Ingram and again pressed him to let me start forthwith. He didn't exactly say no, but was inclined to temporize.

Later I gathered that with true journalistic acumen he had in his mind that the British public were not exactly hungering after pictorial representation of Italian reverses. There was no hesitation on his part as soon as the first indication of the successful " push " arrived. My marching orders then were as peremptory as on previous occasions. I forgot to mention that I had received a telegram from the Ministero del Interno in Rome telling me I was permitted to return to Headquarters when I wished ; so I had no anxiety on that score.

I got back to the Italian Front, therefore, in time to witness the expiring effort of the Austrian thrust.

On my journey across Italy I found everywhere a refreshing calm and confidence and not the slightest

indication of any nervousness. Milan had had one or two visits from *Taubes*, so was in darkness at night, otherwise there was no reminder of the war ; the life and gaiety of the city was the same as ever, and it was apparently bubbling over with prosperity.

There was a noticeable improvement in the railway service to Udine. Instead of a rough and ready journey there were now a sleeping car and restaurant attached to the train, so one travelled in comfort.

Udine appeared to me much changed. There were far fewer soldiers to be seen in the streets, owing probably to the fact that the fighting lines were now so much farther away, and the old time bustling military activity was no longer noticeable. An air of stolid business seemed to have taken its place. Many of the big public buildings that had been temporarily utilized for staff purposes, and which used to overflow with martial activity were now closed ; more convenient quarters having been found elsewhere.

To anyone, therefore, arriving in Udine now for the first time the little town must have appeared quite commonplace, apart from its historical and architectural features.

But the greatest change was at the Censorship. It had been improved beyond all recognition, and it was evident that the Government no longer regarded the representatives of the fourth estate as interlopers, but as honoured guests.

A fine, roomy old palace had been rented and transformed into a Press Bureau and club for the war-correspondents. The Censorship staff, consisting of three officers—Colonel Barbarich, Lt.-Colonel Clericetti, and Captain Weillschott, three courteous and genial gentlemen—did their utmost to make the lot of the correspondents as pleasant as possible. They were good friends rather than mentors, and

you could not help having the greatest regard and esteem for them.

In addition to the spacious and comfortable club-room, where writing paper and other requisites were provided, and soldiers were on duty as club servants, the Government had gone one better than any club I know of, for, with true Italian hospitality, black coffee after lunch or dinner, afternoon tea with cakes, and "soft" drinks in the evening were provided free of charge.

Before lunch or during the afternoon one was pretty sure to meet here everyone who was in Udine in connection with journalism, or who was visiting the Front ; as Udine was still the starting point for expeditions to the lines, and it was only here that the military passes were issued.

The Censorship, therefore, had grown into a permanent and well-organized institution, but it had dwindled to insignificant proportions so far as the number of accredited correspondents was concerned, as compared with what it had been the previous year.

I was much surprised to find when I returned to Udine that there were not more than ten Italian pressmen there, and that I was the only foreign representative. As a matter of fact, during the whole of the three months I was at the Front this year I practically had the whole field to myself.

Considering the magnitude of the operations which culminated in the fall of Gorizia, it is scarcely to be wondered at that this remarkable absence of Entente correspondents excited much comment at Headquarters.

The Italian correspondents wore an enamel badge to indicate their profession, and military passes, "Salvo Condotti," were issued to everyone. These passes were for fourteen days only, in the case of the foreign correspondents, who were not allowed

to go anywhere unless accompanied by an officer deputed by the Censor.

I was shown particular courtesy and latitude, and all irksome restrictions waived in this respect, probably on account of my being an artist, as distinct from a journalist. I had moreover no difficulty whatever in remaining up at the Front as long as I chose, and on leaving was informed I was at liberty to return whenever I wished and without any further formality.

The complete freedom of action this gave me was particularly delightful, and was in marked contrast to what I had experienced on the Western Fronts. I found several old friends amongst the Italian correspondents established permanently at Headquarters, so there was no difficulty in making arrangements with regard to a car, as, of course, one could go nowhere without one.

It may be of interest to mention that only military chauffeurs were allowed to drive in the zone of operations, and their permits had to be renewed at stated intervals.

On arriving in Udine everybody in the newpsaper line was away in the Trentino, as obviously all interest centred there for the moment ; the Censorship building was, therefore, very forlorn and deserted looking.

I duly reported myself and was given my " pass " to go on to the scene of action at once if I chose ; not the slightest difficulty was placed in my way ; in fact, everything was done to facilitate my work, even to providing me with a car and an officer to act as my guide.

So without delay I started for Vicenza, the nearest important place to the fighting. Everything was very calm and peaceful there, no sign of anything out of the common happening. Yet the Austrians had got within 25 miles of the city and less than five from

the Venetian Plain, which surrounds it. Truly the Latin temperament has undergone a wonderful metamorphosis in the last decade.

We stayed the night in Vicenza, and started the following morning for Arsiero, the Italian town in Schio, occupied by the Austrians, and which had only a few days previously been recaptured. For the first fifteen miles or so there was nothing of particular interest along the road except the endless defile of troops and transport of every description, such as might have been expected ; but in the villages the daily life of the peasants appeared to be going on as usual, with women and children everywhere.

Then one appeared to cross an invisible line of demarcation, and once beyond it, all was changed.

It was like going from daylight into darkness. The smiling villages were deserted, save where some of the cottages were occupied by soldiers. Through the open windows one saw that not only were the inhabitants gone, but that they had removed most of their household goods and chattels with them.

In several places were indications of panic—articles lying about as though dropped in flight, even washing abandoned by a stream. The sadness of it all was most impressive, but worse was to come. As we neared the scene of the Austrian thrust there was abundant evidence of the fate that would have been in store for any hapless folk whose homes happened to be in reach of the Austrian guns.

Up till now what had impressed me perhaps most of all in the war on the Italian Front was the entire absence, so to speak, of the horrors of war in the shape of devastated towns, villages and country sides, such as one got so hardened to in France and Belgium. This impression was now to be rudely dispelled.

Once inside the radius of the big guns the spectacle was but a repetition of what I had seen on the

Western Front; heaps of shapeless rubble and smouldering ruin on all sides bore witness to Hun methods of frightfulness.

We at length came in sight of Arsiero and had to leave the car as the road, which had been getting more and more choked with *débris*, now became impassible. Moreover, big shells were coming over with persistent frequency, and we could not afford to take any risk of our transport being injured. We had no desire to walk back.

One must have seen the Front here for oneself in order to form any conception of what the Austrian thrust meant, and how near it was to succeeding.

Arsiero is situated in the valley of Astico; behind it is the semi-circle of mountains which form the boundary of the tableland of the Altepiano, so close as to dominate it completely, foremost amongst these mountains being M. Cenzio and M. Cimone, standing up like colossal barriers above the valley.

From the point of view of an artist it would be difficult to conceive a more delightful panorama than one had before one's eyes: it was a glorious picture waiting to be painted in peace time, but you felt that there was nothing attractive about if from the military point of view. If an enemy were in possession of all these superb heights, then the positions in the valley below would be very undesirable, to say the least of it; and without any knowledge of military matters you realised that the valley and all that it contained —towns, villages, vineyards and what not—was completely at the mercy of the men who manned the guns up above, and also that under cover of these guns immense masses of troops could be safely brought down the side of the mountains on to the plains, and established there pending further movements.

Following up your thoughts as an amateur strategist, you could not fail to come to the conclusion

that the valley was as good as lost if such a contingency came to pass, unless the defenders could achieve what looked like a sheer impossibility, and drive the invaders from their positions on the plain and back again up the mountain side.

The idea of such a possibility was too fantastic to waste a thought on it. Yet this is actually what happened during that fateful week when Italy was on the brink of disaster.

On the road leading to the town there were signs everywhere of the Austrians, and of the desperate fighting that had taken place here only a few days previously. I had thought that there might be a certain amount of panicky exaggeration in the reports of the extent of the Austrian advance towards the place, but there were incontestable proofs in the shape of trenches, barbed wire and so forth pushed forward well in front of Arsiero.

Every yard of the enemy's advance had been methodically consolidated, but nothing had stopped the rush of the Italians—their blood was up for vengeance—they were fighting on Italian soil and on their way here had passed through the devastated villages and ruined countryside, and had heard tales of outrage and infamy.

It was a case of God help the Austrians if they caught up with them, for along the whole Front there had been considerable evidence of the enemy's barbaric methods ; in one place, for instance, near Magnaboschi, hundreds of naked corpses of Italian soldiers were found in the mire.

With the knowledge of what they might expect if the Italians got to grips with them, the Austrians, once they got on the run, never stopped till they were safely back in their old positions, and here they were putting up a stubborn fight when I was in Arsiero.

They were not beaten by any means, although driven from Italian soil. That General Cadorna

was evidently aware that any relaxation of pressure would have brought them on again was substantiated by the number of troops he was keeping in this sector.

Arsiero had suffered considerably, and although not entirely in ruins, as has been stated, was more damaged by fire and shell than any place in Italy I had yet seen.

On the outskirts of the town the gairish *nouvel art* villa of the famous Italian writer, Antonio Fogazzaro, which must have cost him a little fortune to build was now but an unsightly ultra-modern ruin standing in the midst of a wilderness of park-like grounds. One of the most advanced of the Austrian communication trenches leading into the valley started from here.

A little distance further down the road were the immense paper-mills of Rossi and Co., said to have been the largest in Europe, and which employed hundreds of workpeople.

The buildings were absolutely wiped out. They had been deliberately set fire to by the Austrians before they evacuated the town. Nothing remained now but acres of crumbling walls, smouldering timber, and twisted *débris* of machinery, over which hung a pall, as it were, of smoke, a pitiful spectacle of wanton, insensate destruction.

The town itself, a picturesque, rambling, up-hill and down-dale sort of place was only destroyed in patches, but with the shells still coming over there was yet a possibility of its utter destruction.

As the gunfire seemed to have lulled a bit, we had a stroll up to the battlefield on the hill beyond the houses. There a barrage of shell-fire had evidently been attempted, judging from the fragments of shell-cases of all calibres lying about. In places the ground was littered with the *detritus* of war, and looked like an old-iron and rag-refuse heap. Here

and there were interesting curios and many unexploded projectiles in perfect condition. It occurred to me that I would take one of these away with me as a souvenir for my studio, and was stooping down to pick up one when a soldier, who was passing, rushed towards me yelling out at the top of his voice, "Non toccate! non toccate! Signore."

I did not understand much Italian, but I knew enough to comprehend that I was not to touch it, and thought it strange that with all this rubbish lying about I could not take something if I fancied it.

My companion came up at that moment and explained to me that it was most dangerous to handle these unexploded live shells—even walking too close to them has been known to cause them to explode. I did not want any further telling, and contented myself with taking an empty .77 as a souvenir.

But nothing had stopped the rush of the Italians (*see page* 158)

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CHAPTER XIII

THE fighting on the Asiago plateau—Brilliant counter-offensive of General Cadorna—I go to Asiago—Wonderful organization of Italian Army—Making new roads—Thousands of labourers—The military causeway—Supply columns in full operation—Wonderful scenes—Approaching the scene of action—The forest of Gallio—The big bivouac—Whole brigades lying hidden—The forest screen—Picturesque encampments—The "bell" tent as compared with the *tente d'abri*—Our car stopped by the *Carabinieri*—"Nostri Canoni"—We leave the car—The plain of Asiago—The little town of Asiago in distance—The Austrian and Italian batteries and Italian trenches—Hurrying across—The daily toll of the guns—Asiago in ruins—Street fighting—Importance attaching to this point—An ominous lull—Regiment waiting to proceed to trenches—Sad spectacle—The quarters of the divisional commandant—His "office"—Staff clerks at work—Telephone bells ringing—The commandant's regret at our coming—Big artillery attack to commence—A quarter of an hour to spare—A peep at the Austrian trenches—A little ruined home—All movements of troops to trenches by night—Artillery action about to commence—Not allowed to go to trenches—Adventure on way back—Attempt cross no man's land at the double—My little "souvenir" of Asiago—Bursting shells—Ordered to take cover—The wounded

soldiers and the kitten—Anything but a pleasant spot—The two *Carabinieri*—Cool courage—In the "funk hole"—An inferno—My own impressions—Effect on soldiers and our chauffeur—The wounded sergeant—We prepare to make a start back—Irritating delay—A shrapnel—My companion is wounded—Transformation along road—Curious incident.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Austrian thrust was not confined to the Arsiero sector, although it was undoubtedly there that they made their greatest effort in men and guns. The Asiago plateau in the district of the Sette Communi was the scene of desperate fighting simultaneously with that around Arsiero.

The counter offensive of General Cadorna in this direction was, if anything, more brilliantly conceived and carried out than in the Astico valley, and that is saying a great deal. But here again, although driven back, the enemy was by no means beaten, and continued to fight sullenly for every yard he was forced to yield. Although the Italians were pressing closely on the enemy's heels, it was a tough job to keep him on the move, as I was able to judge for myself.

I went up to Asiago on my return from Arsiero, and must admit I was astounded at all I saw ; it was inconceivable that so much could have been accomplished in so short a time.

I have so often insisted on the wonderful organization of every branch of the Italian Army that I hardly like to revert to it again, but I had just returned, after having been away for several months, and I found that my impressions were precisely the same as in the beginning of the war ; preparedness is still the *mot d'ordre*. An instance of this will serve to convey my meaning.

It is uphill most of the way to the tableland where Asiago is situated, and before the Austrian onslaught the roads to the plateau were of so rough and primitive a description as to be quite inadequate to meet the requirements of the immense transport service of the army being sent up.

In order to cope with the exigencies of the situation drastic measures had to be adopted, which were evidently forseen and arranged for in the event of certain contingencies such as the present one arising.

Thousands of labourers, young and old, of the military classes not yet called up, but who undoubtedly had been warned for this duty, were brought from all over the country, provided with picks and shovels and sent here by express trains. Without the delay of an hour practically, they were set to work to cut down obstructing trees and widen, build up and level the existing roads.

Of course they were well paid: five lires a day and their food provided, but it was not a mere question of pay—of that you cannot fail to be convinced—only men working with their hearts in their job could have accomplished what these gangs of men did in the time. It is truly an object-lesson in the value of organized labour.

The fine broad highway, complete in every necessary detail, such as stone parapets at the curves, and walling-up where there is risk of landslides, came into being as though by the touch of a magician's wand, and proved of incalculable value in the counter attack which was meanwhile preparing. The transport of the masses of troops synchronizing with the completion of the roads.

Certain it is that without such organization it would have required many weeks to have carried out what was done in a few days, and in the meantime the invaders, it is to be assumed, would not have been idle on their side.

When I motored up to Asiago, had I not been told how long this roadway had been in existence I should have said it was years old, instead of days.

Along this military causeway was as busy and animated a scene as could be imagined. The Italians

had already re-captured all the positions in the Sette Communi, and were pushing steadily on towards the Altepiano beyond Asiago.

The supply columns were, therefore, now in full operation, and one passed what was practically an endless convoy of munition trains, motor-lorries, picturesque carts from every corner apparently of the peninsula, and long strings of pack horses and mules. In and out of this imposing column and up the steepest parts of the road dispatch riders on motor bicycles dashed along with reckless speed and marvellous dexterity.

It was a wonderfully inspiriting scene, and this was accentuated as one gradually began to hear the booming of the Italian guns in the distance. We were rapidly approaching the scene of action, and the Austrians were being given no respite.

The effect of all this, together with the glorious air of the mountain, was as exhilarating as champagne—one felt years younger. The car seemed to go too slowly, so eager were you to get on, and be in the thick of it all.

The mountain side was bare and bleak, with scarcely a vestige of tree or shrub—but on the table-land beyond the crest it gradually changed, and we entered a belt of pine forest, dark and gloomy.

This was the forest of Gallio. The road wound in and out of the dense trees, and only a short distance ahead could be seen. We had now passed the head of the transport convoys, and came up with reinforcements hurrying forward.

A remarkable scene now presented itself. The forest on either side of the road was a big bivouac. The gloom under the trees was alive with troops as far back as one could see. Every yard of ground appeared to be occupied, whole brigades were lying hidden here waiting the order to advance. No more effective screen could have been wished for than

this belt of forest, and it must have been a continual source of anxiety to the Austrian generals to know what it concealed.

It was probably for this reason that the forest of Gallio was the hottest section of this Front, as it was continually being shelled, and the casualties were always correspondingly heavy.

There was something singularly reminiscent of mining scenes in the Far West in all I saw around me as many of the men had erected their picturesque little *tentes d'abri* and formed little encampments in all sorts of out-of-the-way corners. The soldiers were apparently allowed considerable latitude in this respect, possibly because these tents are so easily handled, and by reason of their small dimensions are easily disguised with foliage.

The big and cumbersome " bell " tent so fondly adhered to by the British Army Authorities under all circumstances would have looked very out of date here, where initiative not dogma reigned supreme !

After passing through what gave the impression of miles and miles of encampment, we approached the confines of the trees, and were suddenly hailed by two *Carabinieri* standing under the trees just off the road, and informed that the car was not allowed to proceed any further.*

Of course our chauffeur pulled up without hesitating : he knew that *Carabinieri* have to be obeyed without parley. My companion got out, and I was following him when, scarcely had I got my foot off

* The *Carabinieri* have a special *status* in Italy, and only men of the very highest character are accepted for the corps. In peace time they are country constabulary, and patrol the rural districts ; in war they automatically become military police and are exclusively employed in the immediate rear of the fighting line, watching for deserters, looking after prisoners, carrying despatches, and so forth. They only take orders from their own officers, and never do any military service. On but one occasion have they become combatants, and that was at the battle of Palestro in 1859, when they saved the life of King Humbert by forming a square to protect him. Their war footing is 50,000, of whom 8,000 are mounted.

the step, than there was a deafening report like a thunder clap a few yards away. For a moment I thought my head had been blown off.

"Sonoi Nostri Canoni," remarked my companion, who had been there before, and who knew of an Italian big gun hidden in the trees within a few yards of us; one of many along the outskirts of the forest, I was told later, and which were giving the Austrians much trouble. We left the car here to await our return and walked on. A hundred yards or so and we were clear of the forest, which ended abruptly on the edge of a slight acclivity.

A little below us was a wide expanse of grass-covered plain, and in the centre of it, about a mile away, were the white houses of the little town of Asiago, of which one had read so much during the past few weeks.

Just beyond the town a line of low lying hills stood out against the horizon. On the crest of one of these hills—Monte Interrotto—about two and a half miles distant were the Austrian batteries, and on the slopes below were the Austrian and Italian trenches. In the far distance to the North, Monte Zebio stood out amongst some rugged peaks.

For the moment the scene was fairly peaceful, that is to say the guns on either side were only firing in a desultory way; but, of course, one could not tell how long this would last and what might "come over" at any moment; however, as we had come here with the intention of going right into Asiago, this had to be chanced. My companion advised hurrying across as quickly as possible as there was no cover anywhere, and the road was quite exposed to the view of the Austrian gunners.

It was a typical summer morning, with the birds singing merrily on all sides, so it was somewhat difficult to realize that there was danger in strolling along leisurely, but before we had gone far we met stretcher-bearers coming towards us with their sad

burdens, and quite a number of soldiers carrying wounded men on their backs.

No big engagement was in progress we learned, but the guns and rifles were taking their steady and relentless daily toll all the time.

This constant stream of wounded ended by getting on one's nerves, and made you wonder what the fates had in store for you.

The town, from a distance, appeared to be quite undamaged, but on getting near to it one found it was in a sad state of ruins. Very few of the houses had escaped the ravages of fire or bombardment.

The position of Asiago, midway between the opposing batteries, had, of course, in a great measure brought this about, and was responsible for its gradual destruction.

There was a great deal of street fighting before the invaders were driven out and back to the hills, and in several places were hastily erected barricades formed with broken furniture and other miscellaneous articles. Barbed wire entanglements of a novel construction were also placed in some of the streets in case the Italian cavalry attempted to force a way through.

So Asiago was very closely connected with the stirring events that were taking place, and from being an unheard of little frontier town, had become one of the most spoken of places in Italy.

The fact that the *communiqués* referred to it almost daily is proof of the importance attaching to this point, and it required ceaseless vigilance on the part of the Italians to retain their foothold in its ruined streets. But no attempt has been made to fortify the place, its defences are the trenches on the hills beyond, and which, at the time I was there, were gradually being pushed forward.

Any troops in the town itself were only there *de passage* for a few hours. It would have been risking

unnecessary sacrifice of life to have kept them there for any length of time.

We were in about as exposed a position as could probably have been found on any front, but for the moment there was an ominous lull which portended no good, and so it turned out. The respite was not to last long; the Asiago plateau is far too important a sector of the front to be left long in quietude.

The little town must have been a delightful place before the war, and even now, destroyed though it mostly is, there are a few picturesque corners which the bombardment has spared. There were comparatively very few soldiers about, and the deserted, ruined streets looked unutterably sad; but right in the centre, on an open piece of waste ground, sheltered by some tall houses and a roughly made "screen" of odd pieces of corrugated iron, a regiment was waiting for nightfall to proceed to the trenches outside the town.

I had a good look through an aperture in the screen: the men were noticeably subdued in their demeanour, as well they might be, considering that at any moment they might be under a hail of projectiles and with no means of escaping it.

They had evidently been on the road for some time, as they all looked grimy with dust and dirt and tired out, judging from the way most of them were lying about sleeping. It was an extremely sad spectacle, and I had no inclination to make a sketch of it, novel though it was.

We enquired our way to the quarters of the Divisional Commandant, as my companion had a letter to deliver to him, and an officer we met sent some one with us to show us the house, as outwardly there was no indication of its being occupied. The number of deep dug-outs protected with sand-bags one saw everywhere was sufficient proof of the awful time the men stationed here went through. As

we went along we were constantly meeting stretcher-bearers bringing along wounded men. At the corners of streets men were sheltering close up to the walls as though expecting at any moment something to happen.

The Commandant's "office" was in a house that had suffered badly: there were gaping cracks in the walls, and it looked as if any explosion near it would bring it down with a run.

There were quite a number of staff clerks at work in the ground-floor rooms, and the telephone bells were ringing incessantly.

We were received by the Commandant with much cordiality, and the position of affairs in the immediate vicinity explained to us very lucidly by means of a big military chart fastened to a table in one of the rooms, but he expressed regret at our having come just on that particular day as a big attack by the artillery was timed to commence at eleven o'clock (it was then 10.45), and he feared we should not be able to get back so soon as we wished.

As though in defiant response to his statement, there was at that moment a loud report from an Austrian battery, and a big shell screeched by overhead.

There was still a quarter of an hour to spare before the Italian guns were to start off, so the Commandant suggested our going upstairs to the third floor to have a peep at the Italian and Austrian trenches through a shell-hole in the roof. The house was quite new and built in flats, which had evidently been occupied by fairly well-to-do people.

The room we went into had evidently been a sort of bedroom and nursery combined: it was in a complete state of ruin, furniture smashed, women's clothes jumbled up all over the floor, with tiles and bricks and mortar, here and there among the *débris* a child's toy, a broken doll, and what not, letters and

papers strewn everywhere, and all sodden with rain. There was something inexpressibly pathetic in this little ruined home.

The Italian and Austrian trenches were but a few hundred yards away, and only quite a short distance separated them. There was, however, very little to see even through our powerful binoculars. The whole hillside was very bare, and the trenches looked like mere furrows in it, and yet one knew that these furrows were full of men waiting the opportunity to get out and kill each other.

There was not a sign of life anywhere, as it meant certain death to show yourself if only for an instant, the Commandant told me ; even where we were in this third floor room we ran the risk of being spotted by some vigilant sniper, for the dilapidated roof offered very little shelter.

All movements of troops up to the trenches were made by night, and once the men were in position they were completely isolated, it only being possible to take them their food once during the day, after dark.

On the crest of Monte Interrotto opposite us, about fifteen hundred yards distant, was a curious little squat-looking building which had, I was told, been originally erected as a fort, but now it was merely a landmark probably, and abandoned, or it would have certainly been obliterated by the Italian artillery.

It was just upon eleven o'clock when we came down, and the telephone bells were ringing furiously —the artillery action was evidently about to commence.

My companion, who, by the way, had a camera with him, suggested our going out to the trenches, but when he mentioned it to the Commandant he was told that he, as an officer, could of course go if he wished ; there was nothing to stop him, but I

could not be allowed to accompany him under any circumstances.

The reason for this interdiction was not explained as far as I could gather. There was, however, no arguing the matter, so rather than leave me he decided that since that was the case, and there was nothing more to see here it would be better if we chanced it and made a dash back to the car whilst there was yet perhaps time.

Whilst we were talking, the Italian batteries were already opening fire all along the line, though apparently only in a tentative range-finding sort of way to start with, and the Austrians were beginning to reply by dropping shells round Asiago, several big projectiles bursting in the outskirts of the town.

It looked, therefore, as though we were going to have an exciting time getting back, and so it turned out. The Commandant grimly wished us luck, and off we went.

We had not got far when our adventures commenced. A big shrapnel bursting right over us. Fortunately we had heard it coming, so had time to get behind a wall. The fragments of the shell beat down on the ground like Brobdingnagian hailstones.

After that the firing from both sides seemed to become general, and it was evident that the attack was developing seriously.

Out in the open, as I have said, there was no cover whatever, so there was nothing for it but to attempt to get across the mile of " No man's land " at the double.

Some soldiers, who were going across also, set the pace to start with. I must regretfully confess, however, that I am long past athletics, and even in my best days was never much of a pedestrian, so I very soon had to give in and take it easily.

My companion, who was quite a young man,

And came up with reinforcements hurrying forward (*see page* 165)

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could without a doubt have run the whole distance, but he good-naturedly slowed down to remain with me.

Apart from my lack of stamina, I was somewhat severely handicapped for sprinting, as, at the Commandant's quarters I had been given the butt-end of a big shell as " a little souvenir " of my visit to Asiago.

It certainly was an interesting trophy, though a trifle weighty, as may be imagined, and I did not want to leave it behind if I could help it, as I have a mania for collecting war " curios " for my studio ; but it was a terrible temptation to drop it now and chance getting another later on. However, I stuck to it like grim death and, I may add, eventually brought it to London.

The idea of a man of my years and experience attempting to run a mile in a blazing hot sun and under fire with a piece of iron weighing some 12lbs. under his arm was doubtless ridiculous, and probably my companion thought so, though he said nothing.

We had just got out in the open when we heard a terrific explosion and, looking back, we saw that a shell of the biggest calibre had burst in the town.

An immense column of white smoke and dust rose high in the air, and in it you saw fragments of timber and other *débris* suspended by the force of the explosion in the still atmosphere for what seemed a few seconds—so long, in fact, that my companion actually had time to get his camera out of its case and take a snapshot.

The artillery duel was now spreading ominously, and we could see that shells were bursting unpleasantly near the spot where we had left the car, the objective of the Austrians being, of course, the Italian batteries along the edge of the forest.

About halfway across was what looked like a railway embankment or something of that sort, the road

passing under it by a low archway. There was a cottage close by, and when we got up to it we found that it was a sort of infantry post in charge of a non-commissioned officer, and that the soldiers who had preceded us had been ordered to take cover here for a time—and we had to do the same—the object of this evidently being to prevent too much movement being seen on the road.

The cottage was little better than a shanty, and afforded no protection whatever. In the one room were several badly-wounded men lying on stretchers on the ground.

The thunder of the guns and the bursting shells outside did not appear to affect them at all ; in fact, two of the most heavily bandaged were actually playing with a pretty little tabby kitten that, strangely enough, was there. It was a curiously homely note, and singularly out of keeping with its surroundings.

The sergeant detained us some little time, and then only allowed us to go on singly and with intervals between. He evidently was using his own judgment in the matter.

When we reached the forest the shells from the Austrian batteries appeared to be passing overhead in a continuous flight, their wailing screech sounding like a high wind in the tree-tops.

It was as if a gale were raging, accompanied by incessant crashes of thunder. Branches of trees were being brought down by the shells in every direction, and altogether it was anything but a pleasant spot to find oneself in.

Yet close by, standing as calmly as though waiting for the storm to pass, were the two *Carabinieri* we had previously seen, and who were evidently on guard here.

In all my war experiences I have never witnessed anything to surpass the *sangfroid* displayed by these two men. Neither the bursting shells nor the falling

trees appeared to perturb them in the least. They were as unruffled as a London policeman on point duty. It was a display of cool courage I shall long remember. Their horses, standing just behind, shared their master's composure ; they showed no signs of nervousness, and were not even fastened up.

I shall have occasion later to again refer to the remarkable fearlessness of the *Carabinieri*—it was one of the things that impressed me most on the Italian Front.

The car was not where we had left it, and the *Carabinieri* told us that the chauffeur had thought it advisable to move it to a less exposed place further up the road so as not to risk its being smashed to pieces.

We hurried on and soon found the car, but no *chauffeur*. After calling out for some minutes and with difficulty making ourselves heard above the din going on ; we saw him coming up from what looked like a cellar under the trees.

This was a " dug-out " or what our English Tommies have humourously designated as a " funk-hole," and was constructed of heavy timber covered with turf and several layers of sandbags. It was entered by a short flight of steps, so we went down to have a look at it. One might have been in a settler's hut out in the wilds somewhere, though for the matter of that all log shanties convey that impression.

It was a very rough and gloomy place, but I was told that the King had taken " cover " here only the day before, and had been forced to stay in it for several hours.

Some soldiers were there, so we sat down with them and had a chat, and it was well we did, for the firing increased in intensity every moment, and heavy projectiles began to burst on the roof of the " dug-out " with such terrific force that one expected at any moment the whole place would be blown to atoms.

The very ground trembled under the shock of the explosions. I never thought that human ears or nerves could stand such an inferno as we were in for during the next hour.

The effect on me personally was at first a sort of atrophy of my senses—a feeling came over me that if this was to be my end, well let it be a quick and complete finish, no blinding or maiming or other drawn out agony. Next a sensation of extreme hunger, which at the time I felt inclined to pat myself on the back for, as indicating heroic indifference to my surroundings, but which later I learned, to my disappointment, is a well-known manifestation of "funk," a form of nervous dyspepsia—"fringale," the French call it. But gradually these impressions wore off, and I looked around with curiosity to see how the young soldiers around me bore themselves.

Several were in a state of absolute terror at each explosion, and were wringing their hands and ejaculating under their breath "Oh, Dio—Oh, mamma!" whilst others sat stock still and gazed in front of them in moody silence.

Our chauffeur was very much upset and made no attempt to disguise it; so much so, in fact, that I wondered how on earth he would be able to drive us back; his nerve seemed to be quite gone, and his face was ghastly white.

Suddenly a soldier rushed down the steps calling out frantically that the sergeant was mortally wounded and asking if anyone had any brandy. No one had any, and I made a mental note never again to be without a flask of it in my pocket. The poor fellow was lying just outside the dug-out with his leg badly smashed up by a big fragment of shell.

He was losing consciousness and kept sobbing and crying out for his mother. Fortunately some stretcher bearers were near by, so in a very few minutes he was bound up with an improvised tourniquet to

stop the hemorrhage and hurried off to the nearest ambulance station, though I doubt whether he ever reached it alive.

We returned to the dug-out as the firing shewed no signs of abatement ; but my companion began to get fidgetty, and at last said we might have to stay there for hours if we waited till all was quiet, and suggested our risking it and making a start.

Of course I could only agree ; but the chauffeur was not so anxious. He was, if anything, still more upset by what had just happened ; however, a few kind but forcible words brought him to his senses, and with an effort he managed to pull himself together.

So we all went out somewhat anxiously to see if the car was still in existence, and found that, fortunately, it had passed through its ordeal of fire unscathed and had not been touched.

There was no time to lose, as may be imagined, with shells bursting all round us, but as might have been expected, because we were in a hurry to get away there was an irritating delay, and this delay was directly the cause of an incident that now occurred, and which might very easily have had a fatal result.

The car had to be turned round, not a quick operation at the best of times, and especially in a narrow road, but under fire, a decidedly nerve-testing job.

We were standing in the roadway watching with impatience the apparently awkward manœuvres of the chauffeur when there was a flash like lightning, a loud report and a shrapnel burst right over our heads not more than twenty feet up.

Instinctively I raised my arm to shield my eyes, as I always do ; almost at the same moment I heard my friend, who was just by, call out that he had been hit in the shoulder.

Looking round I saw him stoop down and gingerly pick up a long, jagged fragment of shell lying at his feet. This was the piece that had struck him—it was almost too hot to touch.

He said he did not think he was much hurt, and that it was no use waiting there to do anything for it. So we lost no time in getting off before something more serious happened ; we were only asking for trouble every moment we delayed.

As a matter of fact, although he made light of it, he had a nasty flesh wound ; it turned out that the strap of his camera case, together with his thick overcoat and tunic, had undoubtedly saved his arm.

We had only gone a few yards when a remarkable state of affairs revealed itself : the road had disappeared, so completely was it hidden by trees and branches brought down by the shells.

It was positively startling to see such a transformation in the comparatively short time that had elapsed since we had come along it.

Here was a pretty fix, but luck favoured us in the shape of a soldier, who saw our predicament and indicated a way of getting round the obstacles and regaining the road further on.

I will candidly confess that I was not altogether sorry when we at length got out of range of the Austrian guns.

We had been under fire for more than four hours, and I had had about enough of it for one day.

There was a big stir amongst the troops bivouacked in the forest, and we passed several regiments on the road, which led one to infer that the artillery duel was to be followed up by an infantry attack on a large scale at nightfall, and so it turned out, as I afterwards learned.

But these operations on the Asiago plateau were then, and are still, of almost daily occurrence, and, serious though they may appear when seen at close

range as on this particular occasion, are evidently but a side issue in General Cadorna's main plan of campaign.

We witnessed a somewhat curious incident on our way back. Going down the steep zig-zag road a big motor ambulance waggon failed to take one of the sharp curves sufficiently to get on to the straight run beyond, and was only brought up by the brake on the extreme outer edge of the road, which, as it happened, had no parapet at this particular spot. It was in imminent danger of going over, a drop of at least a hundred feet.

There was no lack of help, as there was an endless line of traffic going both ways, and it was, of course, all held up by the occurrence, so many willing hands were forthcoming. Big stones were carefully placed under the wheels to prevent any forward movement of the heavy vehicle.

Then suddenly, to the surprise and amusement of everyone, the least severely wounded occupants jumped out of the wagon, and, in spite of their bandaged condition, vigorously assisted in pushing it back to safety.

CHAPTER XIV

SLOW but certain progress on the Trentino front—An open secret—The mining of the Castalleto summit.—Carried out by *Alpini*—Recapture of Monte Cimone; also by *Alpini*—Heroic exploits—Udine one's *pied à terre*—An ideal "News centre"—The Isonzo Front—The old days of the war correspondent as compared with the present conditions—Well to be prepared—Returning to Udine for lunch—Attracting attention—Unjustifiable—Things quiet at the Front—Unusual heat of the summer—Changeable weather at Udine—Early days of August—Increasing activity in the Isonzo Sector—Significant fact—*Communiqué* of August 4th—The *communiqué* of the following day—General attack by Italians all along this Front—Arrange start for scene of action—My car companions 6th August—Magnificent progress everywhere—Afternoon news—Capture of Monte Sabottina announced—We make for Vipulzano—On the road—Stirring scenes—"New" regiments—"Are we downhearted"—The penchant for Englishmen—A *cortege* of prisoners—Like a huge crowd of beggars—Half-starved and terror-stricken strapping young fellows.

CHAPTER XIV

THE success of the counter - offensive of General Cadorna in the Trentino had a cogent bearing on the stirring events which were to take place a few weeks later. Meanwhile, as I have pointed out, the Austrians, although pushed back, were by no means beaten, and during the whole of the month of July the Trentino Front loomed large in the *communiqués*.

Slow but certain progress was continually being reported, and if nothing startling in the shape of an advance could be recorded, it was satisfactory to note that the Italians were without a doubt holding up the greater part of the entire Austrian Army on this Front alone.

This has been demonstrated beyond controversy, and in itself was no mean achievement, and spoke volumes for the tenacity and endurance of the Italian soldier, for it must not be overlooked that this Army was not composed of the offscourings of the Dual Empire, but its crack regiments, and commanded by its most distinguished officers.

It was an open secret that had it not been for an error of judgment and generalship on the Italian side, the Austrians would never have been so near achieving success.

The sudden *mise en retraite* of one of the best known generals, together with several divisional officers, bore this out, and proved that General Cadorna will not overlook incompetency at a critical moment, however high-placed may be the offender, or what his previous record may be. This faculty, if one can so term it, of coming to rapid decisions and holding by them is one of the most characteristic traits of the Italian Generalissimo.

In the Trentino the weeks following the great push may, therefore, have appeared quiet in comparison with what had taken place during these exciting days, but they were by no means uneventful; on the contrary, they were marked by two exceptionally brilliant exploits which, as was seen, had considerable influence on operations elsewhere, and went far to consolidating the Italian gains.

The mining and blowing up of the important Austrian position on the Castalleto summit, east of the peak of Col dei Bos, was one of these feats.

The work was entrusted to the *Alpini*, and was brilliantly carried out, as may be imagined, for the *Alpini* never do things by halves. With infinite perseverence, and in the face of continual difficulty, and peril, a tunnel some twelve hundred yards in length was bored, an immense charge of dynamite was exploded, and the whole of the Austrian force that occupied the summit was buried in the wreckage.

This success restored to the Italians the command of the Dolomites Road, and enabled them to resist all attempts on the part of the Austrians to regain the position.

The other great event of the month was the recapture of Monte Cimone, the mountain which towers above Arsiero. This exploit was also accomplished by the Alpini.

The table-like summit had been in the possession of the Austrians since the latter part of May, and had been transformed by them into a veritable citadel, and one of the strongest points on their line of defence in this region.

The *Alpini*, as was to be expected from these mountaineering athletes, set out without hesitation to accomplish what must have looked like the impossible to the ordinary soldier, though it was really but a repetition of previous heroic exploits of a like nature.

It appeared to me as a layman, incredible that anything but a chamois could clamber up the cliff-like front of Cimone—that any human being could do it never occurred to me for a moment.

It looked a sheer impossibility, yet the *Alpini* did it, and in spite of the plunging fire from machine guns on the summit, and the shells from flanking batteries at Settecase further up the valley of the Astico.

Verily these soldier mountaineers have well merited the eagle plumes that adorn their Tyrolean hats.

I have recounted these exploits, because they appeared to me to exemplify the burning enthusiasm that animated the troops, and made them eager to undertake anything that was asked of them. From what one could gather, scarcely a day passed without some unrecorded deed of daring being accomplished.

Of course it was not possible for a correspondent to learn beforehand any details of the operations about to be carried out, so, in the event of anything big happening, it was purely a matter of luck being on the spot or anywhere near it.

For this reason one made of Udine a *pied à terre*, as it was obvious there was nothing to be gained by motoring from place to place on the offchance of seeing something dramatic. At Headquarters one got to know anything there was in the shape of news, and one could arrange one's movements accordingly.

From the point of view of the journalist, the Censorship Club-room was an ideal " news " centre, since it is not absolutely necessary for him to see what he writes about—so much can be done from hearsay—but for me, as an illustrator, it was obviously a very different matter, and doubtless I missed many a good subject for my pencil through not being fortunate enough to be in the vicinity when some dramatic incident was taking place.

It has always struck me that a pen picture has therefore an advantage over a pencil one. You can, if forced to, make it through the medium of your ears, and your eyes are not essential for its accuracy, as is the case with an artist's notes.

For several weeks the correspondents were all gathered together at Udine, and only left it occasionally for short excursions.

The Isonzo Front was, from the motoring point of view, so short a distance away that you could start off in the car at six o'clock in the morning, be right up to the firing line by half-past seven, see all there was to see and be back in Udine easily in time for lunch. This, of course, would not have been possible before the advent of the petrol engine.

In the old days of the war correspondent, when he could only get about by means of horses, a " trip " such as is now made easily in a morning would have meant a real " journey " of probably a couple of days, and providing himself with food and probably sleeping outfit as well, so as to be prepared against all contingencies.

With the car we could, bar accidents, time our return to a minute almost, if we wanted to ; and it was really remarkable how seldom any *contretemps* occurred on the road—an occasional puncture, nothing more.

Such confidence, in fact, did the Italian correspondents place in their cars, or the offchance of " getting something somewhere," that they hardly ever guarded against accidents by providing themselves with food and drink when on an excursion, and my companions were always surprised when I insisted on taking a parcel of creature comforts for us all, in case we wanted them, for I had discovered what it meant to be really hungry and thirsty.

One day, when visiting a position, I had forgotten to take anything with me, but consoled myself with

The least severely wounded occupants jumped out of the wagon

(*see page* 179)

the idea that I should at least be able to get a crust of bread and a drink of wine on the way.

But it turned out that we were in an outlying district, so I had to pay the penalty of my forgetfulness by being famished all day, as one does not like to ask anything of the soldiers if one can help it: they usually only have sufficient for themselves, and would be too good-natured to refuse you.

Returning to Udine for lunch, to my mind, always gave a touch of the unreal to the scenes you had just witnessed.

There were, as I have said, several really decent restaurants in the town, where everything was well served, and the appointments were quite good. These would be crowded of a day, and one always saw many ladies at lunch-time and dinner.

At one or other of these places you could be sure of meeting friends, and as one was usually much too hot and tired after a long motor drive to trouble to go back to one's rooms to change, you would drop into a restaurant just as you were, in campaigning kit, and covered with dust or mud.

It generally happened, therefore, that you attracted as much attention amongst the well-dressed *habitués* of the place as if you were "got up" for a fancy-dress ball.

At times, when one came back after a surfeit of horrors, it almost seemed unjustifiable to be sitting down to a civilised meal in a cheerful restaurant.

Of course it goes without saying that Udine was not by any means inclined to be light-hearted, and usually the sole topic of conversation everywhere was "la Guerra" and the operations on the different Fronts.

There was an entire absence of excitement at all times, in spite of the daily thrills provided us by the local press, and the arrival in the evening of the big daily papers of Milan, Rome, etc.

When things were quiet at the Front, life in Udine was stagnant, and I often used to wonder what the Italian correspondents could find to write or wire about every day, for they always seemed to be hard at it, even when the *communiqués* were of the very briefest character.

Meanwhile events were undoubtedly shaping well, and day by day one heard of minor successes in Trentino, and steady Italian progress all along the line.

It was only what we all expected, but there was nothing yet of a sufficiently startling nature going on anywhere to induce one to start on motor trips to witness long-range artillery duels.

Moreover, you had got to know every mile almost of the road leading to the front lines, and it ended by becoming as monotonous as it had been interesting at first, as you seldom saw any change.

The guns were always booming in the distance, the "drachen" hung motionless in the still air, and taubes came over and were fired on assiduously but generally without result by the anti-aircraft guns.

Fresh subjects for one's sketch book became more and more difficult to find. It was a period of comparative suspense so far as one was able to judge, and as combined with this, it was a summer of unusual heat even for Italy, a good deal of superabundant energy was necessary to rouse you to activity when there was so little to call for it.

Udine was also bearing out its evil reputation of having the most changeable weather of any place in Italy. Three fine days and a thunderstorm became a bit monotonous, however much you might get used to it.

In the early days of August there was every indication that the period of quiescence was coming to an end, and the *communiqués* began to refer

persistently to increasing activity in the Isonzo sector, and the Trentino was barely mentioned.

The atmosphere for some days past had been charged with rumours that big events were impending, but one got so used to rumours here that no undue importance was attached to the latest. You could only hope that there was some truth in it, as one was beginning to get heartily sick of doing nothing.

Still it was a significant fact that the King and General Cadorna had been frequently seen in this sector during the preceding week and that important movements of troops and *materiel* were taking place daily.

It was not, however, till the 4th August that there were any real indications that rumour for once was true.

In his *communiqué* of that date the Generalissimo concluded with a line which, read in the light of subsequent events, was pregnant with historic interest : " On the Isonzo, commencement of very active fire with heavy shells."

The *communiqué* of the following day gave the welcome intelligence that there had been a vigorous attack in the Monfalcone sector, and that 145 prisoners, amongst whom were four officers, had been taken.

After this there appeared no doubt that something really important was afoot, and this was confirmed by news that came in during the day that a general attack by the Italians all along this Front was rapidly developing.

There was no hesitation about leaving Udine now, and the correspondents prepared to start at once. I arranged for a seat in the car of Gino Piva, of the *Resto del Carlino*, of Bologna, and with us was Roberto Cantalupo, of the *Corrière d'Italia*, of Rome.

Meanwhile one could hear the thunder of the

guns in Udine, and from the terrace of the castle the smoke of the bursting shells on the hills was quite distinctly visible, although forty miles away, and during the night the flashes from the guns looked like distant lightning.

On the 6th of August the whole town was agog with excitement all day, and news arrived almost every hour with the welcome intelligence of magnificent progress everywhere.

As it was already rather late to make a start, we decided to wait till the following morning before leaving, in order to be better able to judge from the news that came in the meantime which would be the best point to make for, a somewhat important consideration.

We did not want to waste time and petrol rushing about all over the country, and one knew from previous experience that it was generally only at Headquarters that reliable information could be obtained.

Out in the country nobody ever seemed to know anything of what was going on a mile away from his own section. As it turned out, it was particularly fortunate we deferred our departure.

Late in the afternoon the news reached Udine that the first line of the Austrian defences from Monte Sabottina to Monte San Michèle had been completely destroyed by the terrific bombardment of the Italian artillery, and that the infantry were preparing to advance.

Later it was announced that Monte Sabottina itself, the key of the defences of Gorizia, had been captured and many prisoners taken. Events were indeed marching with startling rapidity.

We got away shortly after five in the morning, as there was no time to lose, the way things were shaping. I learned we were to make for Vipulzano, the Headquarters of General Capello, the commander

of the sixth corps d'armée operating in the Sabottina zone, and where from all accounts, we should get a capital *point de vue* if the attack developed further, as it is only three miles from Monte Sabottina itself.

We went via Cormons, and, as might have been expected, there was a big movement of troops all along the road. The offensive had evidently been so well timed and pre-arranged that everything was already on the spot and in readiness to proceed anywhere at a moment's notice. The capture of Sabottina was no haphazard slice of luck, but the result of a well-matured *coup*.

We passed several " new regiments " of infantry on their way to the trenches, and one could not fail to be greatly impressed by their smart appearance. Well clothed and shod, their accoutrements and arms in perfect condition, they looked fit to go anywhere and capable of holding their own against any troops Austria could put up. The men were bubbling over with animal spirits and enthusiasm, and we came in for a lot of good-natured banter as we drove past.

As I was in khaki there was no mistaking my nationality, and they seemed delighted to see an Englishman. In fact, I heard several real cockney remarks made for my benefit by fellows who had evidently lived in England, such as :

" Are we down-hearted ? "

" Give my love to London," which elicited much laughter from their comrades, and cries of *viva l'Inghilterra*.

In this connection I must say that the *penchant* for Englishmen and everything English was quite remarkable amongst the soldiers everywhere at the Front, and I am convinced that most of the good-fellowship shewn to me whilst in Italy was chiefly by reason of this sympathy rather than from anything personal.

In a village through which we had to pass we were held up for nearly three-quarters of an hour, whilst a long column of prisoners from Sabottina passed.

There must have been over three thousand, and it would be difficult to imagine a more depressing spectacle than this long *cortège* of weary, dispirited men, plodding moodily through the ruined village. The convoy was guarded by soldiers, and the inevitable *carabinieri* on horseback.

Had it not been for the uniformity of colour, which was, however, but a semblance of the original field-grey, and their head-gear, there was scarcely anything to indicate that only a few hours previously these had all been fully armed and equipped soldiers.

It looked almost like a huge crowd of beggars going past, for most of the bedraggled men were in rags, and very few had any belongings, and all had a half-starved, terror-stricken appearance that was pitiable.

As a matter of fact, many of them we learned had not eaten or drunk anything for several days, the awful intensity of the fire of the Italian Artillery having prevented any supplies reaching them. Several were badly wounded, and limped along painfully or were assisted by their comrades.

So many stories have been going around the Press of the degeneration of the Austrian Army, that I was astonished to see that most of the prisoners were strapping young fellows. From what I had read, I should have expected a preponderance of old men and weedy youths.

If these were specimens of the troops Austria is still able to put in the field, then she cannot yet be in such a condition of *délabrement* as has been stated.

CHAPTER XV

THE commencement of the battle for Gorizia—We approach scene of action—Sheltered road—Curious "Chinese" effect—Headquarters of the 6th Corps d'Armée—Cottage of British Red Cross—Our cordial reception by General Capello—A glorious *coup d'oeil*—Wonderful spectacle—The Socialist Minister Leonida Bissolati—More good news received—The scene before us—Explanation of word "Monte"—Continuous line of bursting shells—Country in a state of irruption—No indication of life anywhere—Not a sign of troops—My motor goggles--Curious incidents—"Progress everywhere"—Colonel Clericetti announces good news—Capture of Gorizia bridge-head—Excited group of correspondents and officers—Arrange start at once with two *confrères* for fighting Front—Our plan—The thunder of the guns—The rearguard of advancing army—Our pace slackened—Miles and miles of troops—Wonderful spectacle of war—Mossa—Go on to Valisella—Machine guns and rifle fire—Ghastly radiance—General Marazzi's Headquarters—Not allowed proceed further—Decide make for Vipulzano—Arrive close on 10 o'clock—Bit late to pay visit—General invites us to dinner—Large party of officers—Memorable dinner—Atmosphere of exultation—News Austrians retreating everywhere—Thousands more prisoners—Dawn of day of victory—I propose a toast—On the terrace after dinner—Battle in full progress—Awe-inspiring spectacle—Little lights, like Will-o'-the-Wisps—Amazing explanation—Methodical precision of it all—Austrian fire decreasing gradually—Time to think of getting back to Udine and bed.

CHAPTER XV

AS we got nearer the scene of action it was as though we were approaching a thunderstorm ; the roar of the guns was absolutely continuous.

The road now began to present a very curious appearance. For several miles it was bordered on either side with high screens of straw matting hung from poles, and wide strips of the same material were hung across the centre ; the object of this being to hide movements of troops and convoys from the view of the Austrian gunners or the prying eyes of airmen.

Quite a " Chinese " effect was produced by this curious screening of the road. These " postiches," as I believe they are called, have long been used on the Western Front, but it was the first time I had seen them here.

The sensation of driving through these " sheltered " roads was almost eerie, as you knew that any moment a shell fired at random might come through the matting, as it was all in full view of the Austrian batteries.

This, in fact, not infrequently happens, I was told, when the artillery is particularly active. The idea of the enemy evidently being to attempt to create a feeling of insecurity and check the *va et vient* along the road, but in this they have not succeeded, as the roads are used as freely as ever.

In other places the screens and traverses were made of brushwood, which appeared to me to be perhaps more effective, as they were not so visible at a distance as the square patches of yellow matting.

The headquarters of General Capello, the commander of the 6th Corps d'armée, were in a large and picturesque house standing in its own grounds on a slight acclivity off the road, and about as near to the operations as one could get that day ; in fact, a battery was stationed in a vineyard within a hundred yards of the building, and was firing with clockwork regularity the whole time we were up there, whilst the Austrian shells in reply were bursting much too near to us to be pleasant.

A cottage on the opposite side of the road had been taken by the British Red Cross Society, and fixed up as an emergency station. One of their big ambulance waggons, with an English chauffeur in khaki, was waiting outside.

The General received us with marked cordiality, and readily gave his permission for us to go wherever we chose in the vicinity, but there was no need to go far, for, as it turned out, one could not have hit on a spot better situated for getting a panoramic view of the battlefield.

There was a broad terrace at the back of the house, from which one obtained a glorious *coup d'oeil* of the whole area from Monte Sabottina to the Carso, and here we found a group of staff officers keenly watching the wonderful spectacle with the aid of a powerful telescope on a tripod.

There were two civilians amongst them who looked strangely out of keeping with the martial surroundings. One of these, an elderly man, was the famous Socialist Deputy, now a Cabinet Minister, Leonida Bissolati, who was making a tour of the Front, accompanied by his private secretary, Cavaliere Eusebio Allamandola. There was also another Deputy present, Signor Arci, but he was in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant of artillery.

Everyone was very elated, as well they might have been considering the way things were shaping for

the Italians, the General telling us that further good news had been received that morning and that still more prisoners had been taken.

So far as one could judge the action was still in the nature of a colossal artillery duel, but the scene before us was so vast that it took some little time to grasp the full import of what was taking place. I will depict it roughly in order to convey some idea of our position.

On our left was Monte Sabottina. In front of us was Monte San Gabriele. The richly wooded undulating plain of Friuli, dotted with villages, stretched away from below the terrace.

In the distance, a couple of miles or so away, was the Podgora Ridge, bristling with gaunt tree-stumps; beyond it you could just distinguish the houses of Gorizia. To the right was the Carso and Monte San Michèle, some five miles away.

It may be mentioned here that the word "Monte" in Italian does not necessarily signify a "mountain" as it is understood in English. The Italian "Monte" is a very elastic term, and, according to the dictionary, may mean a mountain, a hill, or a heap. Monte San Michèle in the Carso, for example, is an ant-heap as compared with, say, Monte Cristallo in the Alps, but they are both referred to as "Monte."

I mention this because so many people I have met speak of the Carso and the lower Isonzo round Gorizia as a mountainous region, whereas the elevations there are merely in the nature of "foot-hills."

However, to revert to the spectacle we had before us at Vipulzano.

From Monte San Gabriele to Monte San Michèle, a distance of, roughly, nine miles, was one continuous line of bursting shells of every calibre; it never ceased for a moment, and this we were told had been going on without a lull for forty-eight hours.

The whole country appeared to be in a state of irruption, and columns of smoke of various colours and fantastic shapes were to be seen rising everywhere like embryo volcanoes.

All this, combined with the incessant thunder of the guns near and far, and the crash of the explosions, was positively blood-curdling.

Meanwhile the Austrian artillery was returning shell for shell apparently, and the Italians were not having it all their own way, though, as it turned out, the Austrian defensive had no backbone to it, and its weakness was becoming more and more evident as time went on.

Seen through the telescope, the desolation of the countryside was revealed in all its horrors. At a first glance it was a rich and smiling landscape bathed in the glorious sunshine of an Italian summer morning, but one soon discovered that the white houses of the villages were now but heaps of ruins.

There was no indication of life in them anywhere—the God of war reigned supreme.

Along the roads there was not a sign of troops nor of any military activity, yet hidden in the dense woods, we were told, masses of troops were concealed waiting the signal to advance as soon as the artillery had finished its work.

I was making a sketch when a shell burst somewhat nearer to the terrace than was agreeable, and shortly after came another.

To my surprise then an officer hurried across to us and said, in French, that the General would feel very much obliged if I would sit in a less exposed position, as the sun was catching the glass of the motor goggles I was carrying on my cap, and was attracting the attention of an Austrian battery opposite.

I did not require to be asked twice ; one well-aimed shell of the calibre they were using would, I

And day by day one heard of minor successes in Trentino (*see page* 188)

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knew, have made short work of the Headquarter chateau.

There is a certain monotony in watching an artillery duel, and as it was quite uncertain how long this one would last, my companions, after we had been there about a couple of hours, decided that the best thing to do was to return to Udine to get off their " copy," and as I had some sketches I wanted to work up this suited me also.

" Progress everywhere " was reported the following morning, and there was an air of suppressed excitement in the town. Everyone seemed to have the idea that we were on the eve of important events. And so it turned out.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I went to the Censorship to have tea, and on the stairs I met Colonel Clericetti ; he was positively beaming with joy. " Have you heard the news ? " he exclaimed in English and wringing me effusively by the hand (for two pins I think he would have embraced me !)

" We have captured the Gorizia bridgehead, and it is rumoured that at any moment the troops may get into Gorizia itself."

This was indeed wonderful tidings, and I felt I must be off again at once if possible to get some sketches. In the Press-room there was an excited group of correspondents and officers discussing the victory.

My *confrères* with whom I had made the excursion the previous day were not there for the moment, so in order not to lose time, I looked round for someone else who might have a vacant seat in his car, and was not only lucky enough to find one, but also with two men who were starting immediately.

I hastened back to my lodgings to put together a few things in my rucksack, as one could not tell how long we might be away or what might happen.

The news was spreading like wildfire through the

town. On the place Vittorio Emanuele, a crowd was beginning to gather ; on all sides one heard the name of Gorizia.

In the main street the inhabitants were already preparing to put up flags. It was like the sun coming out after a storm ; an air of relief after the tension of so many long months was discernible on every face.

Owing to some trouble with the car and my companions being delayed by telegrams they had to send, it was getting towards evening by the time we got away, but we found the road was pretty free to start with ; so we made up for lost time by dashing along at top speed.

My car mates were Rino Allessi, of the *Secolo*, of Milan, and Giovanni Miceli, of the *Prensa*, of Buenos Ayres also an Italian correspondent, but for the nonce representing this South American paper.

Both of them spoke French and were jolly good fellows, though for the matter of that, all the Italian correspondents up at Udine were charming, and one could not have come across a more genial and good-natured group of men anywhere.

Our plan was, of course, to get as near the fighting as possible, and with this idea we were making for Mossa, which is about a mile and a half from the Gorizia bridgehead, and where we had been informed we should find the Headquarters of General Marazzi, the Divisional Commander, from whom we hoped to get permission to go on further.

When we had passed Cormons the thunder of the guns, which we had heard all the way, appeared to increase in intensity till it resembled a continuous roll of thunder, and always getting nearer.

The road now began to be congested, clouds of dust told us we had caught up with the rearguard of the advancing army, and our speed had to be slackened considerably. In places, in fact, we were

hung up altogether, but it was no use worrying about it; our pace was being regulated, we found, by a monster gun just ahead, drawn by a traction engine.

There seemed to be miles and miles of troops, infantry, cavalry, and artillery.

The sun was setting, and in the waning light the interminable column presented a spectacle of war that I shall never forget.

We were challenged by a patrol just before we got to Mossa, but had no trouble whatever, as our passes were quite in order.

We learned that the Divisional Headquarters were at Valisella, quite close by, but away from the main road, so we made our way there. To get away from the dust for a little while was indeed a relief; we had been almost choked with it, and looked like millers.

It was now almost dusk, and we were so close to the fighting that we could hear the machine guns and rifle fire in between the reports of the guns.

Every now and again what appeared to be fireworks lit up the scene with ghostly radiance.

At the General's quarters, which were in a fine old house, the courtyard was crowded with officers and motor cyclists. Someone came and asked our business. We explained our object in coming, so he took in our cards and we waited outside for his reply.

After being kept waiting some little time, a staff officer, accompanied by an orderly carrying a lantern, came up from some underground part of the building.

He told us briefly that the General said it was impossible to allow us to proceed any further. Moreover, the road was quite blocked with troops a little further on, the bridge had been destroyed, and fighting was still proceeding.

There was no arguing the matter—that would not have helped us—so we got back into the car glum with disappointment. We motored slowly for some distance, whilst my companions were examining the map with the aid of a lighted match, and discussing what was best to be done, as we did not feel inclined to return to Udine yet.

Then suddenly it occurred to them to make for Vipulzano and see if General Capello, whom one of them knew, would help us.

It was only a run of about four miles, but it was across country and away from the troops, so it was a bit difficult to find our way in the dark ; but we managed after some delays to get there somehow, though it was close on ten o'clock when we arrived. It struck me as rather a coincidence my returning at such an hour to the place I had left only the day before.

Not a light was to be seen in the house, and had it not been for the soldiers on sentry duty outside one might have thought it was uninhabited.

It was a bit late to pay a visit, but we had come so far that we decided to risk it, and groped our way up through the garden to the front door. There we found an orderly, who took our cards in.

It was pitch dark where we stood in the shadow of the house, but the sky was illumined every now and then by fitful flashes of light from the battlefield. The thunder of the guns was still as terrific here as on the previous day, but you could not fail to note that the firing was now of greater volume from the Italian side.

We were not kept waiting long. The orderly returned, accompanied by an officer.

The General, he told us, was only just sitting down to dinner, and would be very pleased if we would join him.

Of course there was no refusing, though we felt

a bit diffident as we were white with dust. However, *à la guerre, comme à la guerre*, so we followed the officer in.

The contrast between the darkness and gloom outside and the brightness within was startling : a corridor led into a large central hall, such as one sees in big country houses in England. This was evidently used as a staff-office, and was lighted by several shaded lamps, which gave it quite a luxurious appearance. The dining room was off the hall.

There was a large party at dinner, amongst whom Signor Bissolati and several of the officers I had met the previous day.

Everyone appeared unfeignedly pleased to see us, and the General, doubtless out of compliment to me as an Englishman, seated me next to him. That dinner party will long live in my memory.

It is difficult to describe the atmosphere of exultation that pervaded the room ; it positively sent a thrill through you. As may be imagined, everyone was in the highest spirits.

We learned that the latest news was that the Austrians were retreating everywhere, that thousands more prisoners had already been taken, and that the troops were only waiting for daylight to make the final dash for Gorizia.

The day of victory so long waited for was soon to dawn. The incessant thunder of the guns now sounded like music, for it was mainly that of Italian guns now, and we knew they were moving forward all the time towards the goal.

I am usually painfully nervous when I attempt to make a speech, however short, but this was an occasion when nervousness was impossible, so I got up, and raising my glass towards the General, asked to be permitted to drink to the Glory of the Italian Army ! Needless to add, that the toast was received with a chorus of applause.

The dinner consisted of five courses, and was excellent; in fact, the chef must have tried to surpass himself in honour of the victory.

The conversation was almost entirely confined to war subjects, and I was surprised to find how well-informed my neighbours were in regard to England's great effort. I could not help thinking how very few English officers could tell you as much about Italy's part in the war.

After dinner we all went out on to the terrace, and the sight that met our eyes beggars description.

It was now past eleven o'clock, but the battle was still raging furiously from San Floriano to the Carso. From end to end of the line the crests of the hills were illuminated by the lightning-like flashes of exploding shells, and the rays of powerful searchlights.

The still night air seemed as though to vibrate with the continuous crash of field-pieces. Every now and again " Bengal lights " and " Star shells " rose in the sky like phantom fireworks, and shed a weird blue light around.

We stood for some time in wrapt silence, spell-bound by the awe-inspiring spectacle, for it was certain that nothing living could exist in that inferno on the hills.

The wooded plain below the terrace had the appearance of a vast black chasm from where we stood. It was studded curiously here and there with little lights like Will-o'-the-Wisps that were moving forward in unison.

From what I had seen for myself the previous day I knew that the whole countryside was uninhabited, so I asked an artillery officer standing by me if he could let me know what they were.

To my amazement he told me that they were the guiding lanterns of Italian batteries advancing—to enable the officers to keep touch and alignment in the darkness.

There were, he added with dramatic impressiveness, at that moment over six hundred guns converging on the Austrian positions.

The methodical precision of it all was simply marvellous ; even here, not even the smallest detail of organization had been left to chance.

Meanwhile the Austrian fire was noticeably decreasing, till at last the crash of the guns came from the Italian batteries only ; the " Bengal lights " and " Star shells " were less frequent, and only one solitary searchlight remained.

We had seen probably all there was to see that night, and it was about time to think of getting back to Udine for a few hours sleep, if we were to return to see the big operations in the early morning, so we made our way back to the house to take our leave and fetch our coats.

In the corridor an orderly asked us courteously to make as little noise as possible, the General having gone to bed. We looked at our watches : it was getting on for one o'clock, and we had a thirty mile drive before us.

CHAPTER XVI

THE capture of Gorizia—Up betimes—My lucky star in the ascendant—I am put in a car with Barzini—Prepared for the good news of the capture—Though not so soon—A slice of good fortune—Our chauffeur —We get off without undue delay—The news of the crossing of the Isonzo—Enemy in full retreat—We reach Lucinico —The barricade—View of Gorizia—The Austrian trenches—" No man's land "—Battlefield *débris*—Austrian dead—An unearthly region—Austrian General's Headquarters—Extraordinary place—Spoils of victory—Gruesome spectacle—Human packages—General Marazzi—Podgora—Grafenberg—Dead everywhere—The destroyed bridges —Terrifying explosions—Lieutenant Ugo Oyetti —A remarkable feat—The heroes of Podgora—" Ecco Barzini "—A curtain of shell fire—Marvellous escape of a gun team—In the faubourgs of Gorizia—" Kroner " millionaires—The Via Leoni —The dead officer—The Corso Francesco Guiseppi —The " Grosses " café—Animated scene—A café in name only—Empty cellar and larder—Water supply cut off—A curious incident—Fifteen months a voluntary prisoner—A walk in Gorizia—Wilful bombardment—The inhabitants—The " danger Zone "—Exciting incident—Under fire—The abandoned dog—The Italian flags—The arrival of troops—An army of gentlemen—Strange incidents —The young Italian girl—No looting—At the Town Hall—The good-looking Austrian woman—A hint —The *Carabinieri* —" Suspects " — Our return journey to Udine—My trophies—The sunken pathway—Back at Lucinico—The most impressive spectacle of the day.

CHAPTER XVI

AS may be imagined, I had no inclination to lie in bed the next morning; in fact, it seemed to me a waste of time going to bed at all in view of what was likely to happen in the early hours. Still there was no help for it since one could not stay at the fighting Front all night, so the only remedy was to be up and out as soon as possible.

I was, therefore, down at the Censorship betimes on the chance of finding an officer or a *confrère* who was going in the direction of the operations, and who would let me have a seat in his car.

My lucky star happened to be in the ascendant, for shortly after my good friend, Colonel Clericetti, turned up, beaming with good humour, and on seeing me exclaimed :

" You are the very man I am looking for ; Barzini is leaving in a car I am letting him have, as his own has broken down, and if you like I will put you with him. I thought you would want to get some sketches as the troops will be entering Gorizia this morning."

Of course I had been somewhat prepared for this news from what I had learned overnight, but I certainly had never expected it would come so soon, although I had long had the conviction that when Gorizia was captured it would be in dramatic fashion.

I was therefore delighted to have a chance of being on the spot when it happened, and was now on tenterhooks to get off at once ; every minute of delay meant perhaps missing seeing something important, for on such an occasion every detail would doubtless be of absorbing interest.

It was indeed a slice of good fortune to be going with Barzini, as he is certainly the best known and most popular of Italian war correspondents, and where he can't manage to go isn't worth going to. His genial personality is an open sesame in itself, as I soon found. Curiously enough, as it turned out, we were the only correspondents to leave Udine that morning. Whether it was that the others did not realise the importance of what was likely to happen or did not learn it in time, I could not understand ; but it was certainly somewhat strange.

Our car was driven by a very well-known journalist of the staff of the *Corriere della Sera*, named Bitetti, who is doing his military service as a chauffeur and is a very expert one at that, and with him was a friend, also a soldier chauffeur, so we were well guarded against minor accidents to the car *en route*.

Well, Barzini and I got off without undue delay, and I soon discovered that with him there would be no " holding up " the car on the way. We made straight for Mossa, which is close to the Gorizia bridgehead. There we got some great news.

During the early part of the night detachments of the Casale and Pavia brigades had crossed the Isonzo and consolidated themselves on the left bank, and the heights west of Gorizia were completely occupied by the Italian infantry. The enemy was in full retreat, and had abandoned large quantities of arms, ammunition and *materiel*. Over 11,000 prisoners had been taken, and more were coming in. Everything was going *à merveille*, and Austria's Verdun was virtually in the hands of the Italians already.

There was no time to lose if we were to be in " at the death." Half a mile further on we reached Lucinico. The Italian troops had only passed through a couple of hours before, so we were close on their heels. The village was in a complete state of ruin,

The object of this being to hide movements of troops and convoys (*see page* 195)

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hardly a house left standing, and reminded one of what one got so accustomed to see on the Western Front.

The car had to be left here, the road being so blocked that driving any further was out of the question ; so, accompanied by two officers and our chauffeur and his friend, we set off on foot with the idea of attempting to cross the battlefield.

Beyond Lucinico we were right in the very thick of it. The railway line to Gorizia ran through the village, but just outside the houses the rails had been pulled up and a solid barricade of stones had been erected across the permanent way.

We got a splendid view of Gorizia from here—it looked a beautiful white city embowered in foliage, with no sign at all of destruction at this distance.

On the high hills beyond, which one knew to be Monte Santo and Monte San Gabriele, little puffs of smoke were incessantly appearing—these were Italian shells bursting—the booming of the guns never ceasing.

The Austrian trenches commenced a few hundred yards beyond Lucinico, and we were now walking along a road that for fifteen months had been " No man's land."

The spectacle we had before us of violence and death is indescribable. Everything had been levelled and literally pounded to atoms by the Italian artillery.

The ground all around was pitted with shell holes, and strewn with every imaginable kind of *débris* : the remains of barbed wire entanglements in such chaotic confusion that it was frequently a matter of positive difficulty to pass at all ; broken rifles, unused cartridges by the thousand, fragments of shell-cases, boots, first-aid bandages, and odds and ends of uniforms covered with blood.

We had to pick our way in places along the edge

of the communication trenches, which were very deep and narrow, and looked very awkward to get into or out of in a hurry.

We had to jump across them in places, but otherwise we endeavoured to give them as wide a berth as possible, as the stench was already becoming overpowering under the hot rays of the summer sun. It only needed a glance to see for yourself what caused it.

The Austrian dead were literally lying in heaps along the bottom. They were so numerous in places, that had it not been for an occasional glimpse of an upturned face, or a hand or a foot, one might have thought that these heaps were merely discarded uniforms or accoutrements.

It produced an uncanny sensation of horror walking alongside these furrows of death, and this was heightened by the fact that at the time we were the only living beings here ; the troops having advanced some distance, we had the battlefield quite to ourselves.

I recollect I had the strange impression of being with a little band of explorers, as it were, in an unearthly region.

Shells were coming over pretty frequently, but it was not sufficiently dangerous for us to think of taking cover, though I fancy that had it been necessary we should all have hesitated before getting down into one of these trenches or dug-outs. Curiously enough, there were very few dead lying outside the trenches. I imagine the intensity of the fire prevented any men from getting out of them.

The railway line traverses the plain on a very high embankment just before Podgora is reached, and the roadway passes under it by a short tunnel.

Here was, perhaps, one of the most interesting and remarkable sights of the whole area. The Austrian General had transformed this tunnel into

his headquarters, and it was boarded up at both ends, and fitted internally like a veritable dwelling-place, as, in fact, it was to all intents and purposes.

You entered by a tortuous passage, which from the outside gave no idea of the extraordinary arrangements inside. There were two storeys, and these were divided off into offices, dining rooms, sleeping quarters for the officers, bath room and general offices. All were well and almost luxuriously furnished ; in fact, everything that could make for comfort in view of a lengthy tenancy.

On the side which was not exposed to the Italian fire, a wooden balcony with carved handrail, had been put across the opening, so from the road it presented a very quaint and finished appearance. Of course these quarters were absolutely safe against any shells, however big, as there was the thickness of the embankment above them.

There was a well-fitted little kitchen with wash-house a few yards away, so that the smell of cooking did not offend the cultured nostrils of the General and his staff, who evidently knew how to do themselves well if one could judge from the booty the Italians captured here in the shape of wines, tinned food, coffee, etc.

But the spoils here consisted of much more important *materiel* than " delicatessen," and proved how hastily the Austrians took their departure. In a building adjoining the kitchen, which was used as a store-house, was a big accumulation of reserve supplies of every description, together with hundreds of new rifles, trenching tools, coils of barbed wire, and stacks of boxes of cartridges. There was little fear, therefore, of a shortage of anything.

This big store-house was also utilized for another purpose thoroughly " Hunlike " in its method. At one end of the building was a gruesome spectacle.

Lying on the ground, like so many bundles of

goods, were about forty corpses tied up in rough canvas ready to be taken away. I don't think I have ever seen anything quite so horrible as these human packages. They were only fastened in the wrappers for convenience in handling as there was no attempt to cover the faces. The callousness of it gave me quite a shock. Of course it was not possible to ascertain what was going to be done with them, but there was no indication of a burial ground anywhere near.

In the roadway opposite the entrance of the " Headquarters " was another motley collection of spoils of victory: rifles, bayonets, ammunition pouches, boxes of cartridges, and a veritable rag heap of discarded uniforms, coats, caps, boots, and blankets.

There was also a real " curio " which I much coveted, but which was too heavy to take as a souvenir, in the shape of a small brass cannon mounted on wheels. What this miniature ordnance-piece was used for I could not make out, as I had never seen one before. All this booty, of course, only represented what the Austrians had abandoned near here. The amount of rifle ammunition captured must have been enormous.

General Marazzi, with several of his staff officers, were using the entrance of the arch as a temporary orderly room, with table and armchairs. Though he was, of course, much occupied, he courteously gave us any information we wanted. He even went further by presenting us with an Austrian rifle apiece as souvenirs of the victory.

The roadway from here passed along the foot of Podgora, the ridge of sinister memories. Every yard of the ground here had been deluged with blood, and had witnessed some of the most desperate fighting in the war. It had once been thickly wooded but now nought remains of the trees on its hogback and slopes but jagged and charred stumps.

There was not a trace of vegetation, and one could see that the surface had been literally ground to powder by high explosives. Shells were still bursting over it, but they appeared to raise dust rather than soil, so friable had it become.

In the long, straggling and partially destroyed village of Grafenberg through which we now wandered, there were some Italian soldiers, but so few that one might have wondered why they had been left there at all. A tell-tale odour on all sides conveyed in all probability one of the reasons.

The dead were lying about everywhere and in all sorts of odd places, in the gutters alongside the road, just inside garden gates, anywhere they had happened to fall. There was a ghastly object seated in quite a life-like position in a doorway, with a supply of hand-grenades by its side. Grafenberg was distinctly not a place to linger in.

Meanwhile we were walking parallel with the Isonzo, which was only a hundred yards or so away ; and the Austrians, though in full rout, were keeping up a terrific flanking fire with their heavy artillery, placed on Monte Santo and Monte San Gabriele with the idea undoubtedly of destroying the bridges. Two were already wrecked beyond immediate repair, one of the arches of the magnificent railway viaduct had been blown up, and the long wooden structure just above Grafenberg had been rendered useless for the moment.

There were two others still intact : an iron bridge the artillery and cavalry were crossing by and a small foot-bridge we were making for. To demolish these, and so further delay the Italian advance, was now the object of the Austrians. To effect this they were sending over projectiles of the biggest calibre. The terrifying noise of the explosion of these enormous shells would have sufficed to demoralise most troops.

At last we came to a pathway leading to the small bridge we hoped to cross by. It was a pretty and well-wooded spot, and the trees had not been much damaged so far. A regiment of infantry was waiting its turn to make a dash forward. We learned that the bridge had been much damaged in the early morning, but had been repaired under fire and in record time by the engineers.

A friend of mine, Lieutenant Ugo Oyetti (the well-known art critic in civil life), did some plucky work on this occasion, for which he received a well-deserved military medal a few days later.

Whilst the repairs were being carried out, two infantry regiments, the 11th and 12th, forded and swam across the river ; a remarkable feat, as it is here as wide as the Thames at Richmond, though it is broken up with gravel islets in many places. It is frequently ten feet deep, and the current is very strong and treacherous.

We pushed our way through the soldiers who filled the roadway, and got to the bridge, which was a sort of temporary wooden structure built on trestles known in German military parlance, I am told, as a " behielfs brücken," and evidently constructed to connect the city with Podgora.

A continuous rain of shells was coming over and bursting along the bank or in the river, and we looked like being in for a hot time. At the commencement of the bridge two *carabinieri* stood on guard as placidly as if everything were quiet and peaceful. There was no objection to our crossing, but we were told we must go singly and run the whole way. The screech of the projectiles passing over head, and the terrific report of explosions close by, made it a decidedly exciting " spurt," and I, for one, was not sorry when I got across.

The opposite bank was steep and rocky, in curious contrast to the Grafenberg side, and was ascended

by a narrow gully. The bridge ended with a wide flight of steps leading to the water's edge, where there was a strip of gravel beach, and seen from below the structure had quite a picturesque appearance. The high banks made fine " cover," and under their shelter troops were resting.

These were some of the courageous fellows who had forded the river, after having stormed the positions at Podgora. Their eyes were bloodshot, they looked dog-tired, and they were, without exception, the dirtiest and most bedraggled lot of soldiers it would be possible to imagine.

The uniforms of many of them were still wet, and they were covered with mud from head to foot,

Yet in spite of the fact that they had probably all of them been on the move the whole night, and under fire most of the time without a moment's respite, they looked as game and cheerful as ever, and most of them seemed to be more anxious about cleaning the dirt from their rifles than resting. The shell-fire did not appear to trouble them in the least.

As we got amongst them, Barzini, with true Latin impulsiveness, shook hands effusively with all those around him, and complimented them on their plucky achievement. It was this little touch of human nature that explained to me the secret of his popularity with the soldiers.

Word was passed round " Ecco Barzini," and the men crowded round to get a glimpse of the famous war correspondent.

Under cover of the overhanging rocks one was able to observe the curtain of shell-fire in comparative security, though at any moment one of these shells might drop " short " and make mincemeat of us.

The Austrians had got the range wonderfully, and every shell burst somewhere along the river

which was really good shooting, but their real object was, of course, to endeavour to destroy the bridges and for the moment they were devoting all their attention to the iron one, which was about four hundred yards below where we were standing, and across which a stream of artillery and munition caissons was passing.

It was truly astonishing how close they got to it each time, considering they were firing from Monte Santo, nearly four miles away, and a slender iron bridge is not much of a target at that distance.

I have never seen such explosions before. They were firing 305mm. shells, and the result was appalling to watch. They might have been mines exploding, the radius of destruction was so enormous.

It brought your heart into your mouth each time you heard the approaching wail of a shell, for fear this might be the one to " get home." You watched the bridge and waited in a state of fascination as it were.

Suddenly, as we were gazing with our eyes glued to our field-glasses, someone called out in a tone of horror, " they've hit it at last."

A shrapnel had burst low down, right in the centre of the bridge, and just above a gun-team that was going along at the trot.

For a moment, till the smoke lifted, we thought that men, horses, and guns were blown to pieces ; it looked as though nothing could escape, but when it had cleared off we saw that only one of the horses had been killed.

In incredibly quick time the dead animal was cut loose and the team continued on its way. There was no sign whatever of undue haste or excitement ; it was as though an ordinary review manœuvre was being carried out. The coolness of the drivers was so impressive that I heard several men near me exclaim enthusiastically " Magnifico ! magnifico ! ! "

I made up my mind to go later on to the spot and make a careful sketch of the surroundings with the idea of painting a picture of the incident after the war ; but I never had an opportunity, as, a few days after, the Austrians succeeded in destroying the bridge.

It was very palpable that at any moment one really unlucky shot could hold up the entire line of communications and prevent supplies from coming up for hours.

In this particular instance there was no doubt that the " hit " was signalled to the Austrian batteries by a Taube which was flying overhead at a great height at the moment, for the gunners redoubled their efforts, and it was only sheer luck that helped the Italians out.

Time to make good their retreat was what the Austrians wanted : they knew perfectly well that with Monte Santo, Monte San Daniele, and Monte San Gabriele still in their possession they could yet give a lot of trouble. Fortunately, however, for the Italians, as it turned out, they had not sufficient guns on these heights to endanger the position at Gorizia.

The soldiers round us now began to move forward, and we were practically carried up the gully with them. At the top was level ground, with grass and bushes and some cottages mostly in ruins. We were in the outskirts of Gorizia.

Another large body of troops was apparently resting here, and the soldiers were snatching a hasty meal before advancing into the city, though there was probably some other reason beyond giving the men a " rest," for keeping them back for the moment.

There had been some desperate fighting round these cottages, judging from the broken rifles and splashes of blood amongst the ruins. Now and then, also, one caught glimpses of the now familiar bundles of grey rags in human form.

A few hundred yards farther on, across the fields,

the faubourgs of the city commenced, and one found oneself in deserted streets.

There were numbers of fine villas, many of considerable architectural pretention and artistic taste, standing in pleasant gardens.

These were evidently the residences of Gorizia's "Kroner" millionaires. Most of these villas were considerably damaged by shells and fire—some, in fact, were quite gutted.

Nearly all the street fighting took place in this particular quarter, and along the Via Leoni especially all the houses were abandoned. Inside these deserted homes were doubtless many gruesome tragedies. One we discovered ourselves. Our young soldier friend, out of boyish curiosity, went into one of the houses to see what it looked like inside. He came out very quickly, and looking as white as a ghost.

I went to see what had scared him. Just behind the door was a dead Austrian officer lying in a most natural position; he had evidently crawled in here to die.

The guns were booming all around, and we could see the shells bursting among the houses a short distance from where we were, yet we had not met a soul since we had left the river banks. This seemed so strange that we were almost beginning to think that the troops must have passed straight through without stopping when we saw a soldier coming towards us.

We learned from him that the city was by no means deserted, as we should see, and that a short distance further on would bring us out into the Corso Francesco Guiseppe, the principal thoroughfare of the city. Then, to our astonishment, he added, as though giving us some really good news, that we should find a big café open, and that we could get anything we liked to eat or drink there. We could scarcely credit what he said.

It seemed a mockery of war—surely it could not be true that the cafés in Gorizia were open and doing business whilst the place was being shelled, on the very morning, too, of its occupation by the Italians, and with the dead still lying about its streets.

We hurried on, anxious to witness this unexpected sight. The bombardment appeared to have affected only a certain zone, and there were but few signs of destruction as one approached the centre of the city, but all the houses were closely shuttered and apparently deserted.

A big screen made of foliage was hung across the end of the street, on the same principle as those one saw along the roads, and evidently with the same object : to hide the movements of troops in the streets from observers in " Drachen " or aeroplanes.

The Corso Franscesco Guiseppe is a fine broad boulevard, and reminded me very much of certain parts of Rheims, it still had all the appearance of being well looked after, in spite of the vicissitudes through which it had passed.

There were detachments of soldiers drawn up on the pavement close to the houses, and already the ubiquitous *carabinieri* were *en evidence*, as they are everywhere along the Front. It seems strange that no military operation in Italy seems possible without the presence of *carabinieri*.

Of civilian life there was not a trace so far ; the city was quite given up to the military.

The " Grosses " Café faced us, a new and handsome corner building. It was very up-to-date and Austro-German in its interior decoration and furniture. German newspapers in holders were still hanging on the hooks, and letters in the racks were waiting to be called for.

Although the place was crowded with officers, there was quite a noticeable absence of any

excitement. Signor Bisolati and his secretary had just arrived, so we made a little group of four civilians amongst the throng of warriors.

As may be imagined, it was a very animated and interesting scene, and every table was occupied. Little did the Austrians imagine a week before that such a transformation would come about.

Our informant had exaggerated somewhat when he gave us to understand that the café was open and business going on " as usual."

The Grosses Café was certainly " open," but it was only a café in name that morning, as there was really nothing to be got in the way of drink or food ; not a bottle of wine or beer or even a crust of bread could be had for love or money.

The Austrians had cleared out the cellars and larder effectually before taking their departure. I am, however, somewhat overdrawing it when I state there was nothing to be got in the way of liquid refreshment. The proprietor discovered that he happened to have by him a few bottles of a sickly sort of fruit syrup, and also some very brackish mineral water to put with it, and there was coffee if you didn't mind its being made with the mineral water.

It appeared that the Austrians had thoughtfully destroyed the water supply of the city when they left, indifferent to the fact of there being several thousand of their own people, mostly women and children, still living there.

It makes me smile when I recall how we ordered the Austrian proprietor about, and with what blind confidence everyone drank the syrup and mineral water, and the coffee. They might easily have been poisoned ; it would only have been in keeping with the Austrian methods of warfare.

The big saloon of the café was quite that of a first-class establishment ; there were cosy corner seats

Two infantry regiments, the 11th and 12th, forded and swam across the river (*see page 216*)

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in the windows looking on the Carso, and as you sat there and listened to the thunder of the guns so close by, it was difficult to realise what a wonderful thing it was being there at all ; and also that at any moment the Austrians might make a successful counter-attack and get back into the city. Our lives, I fancy, would not have been worth much if this had happened.

A somewhat curious incident occurred whilst a little party of us was seated at one of these tables. A very shabbily-dressed civilian, wearing a dirty old straw hat, and looking as if he hadn't had a square meal or a good wash for weeks, came in a furtive way into the café and, seating himself near us, tried to enter into conversation.

With true journalistic *flair* Barzini encouraged him to talk, and it turned out that he was an Italian professor who had lived many years in Gorizia, where he taught Italian in one of the colleges.

When the war broke out the Austrians called on him to join the Austrian Army. He could not escape from the city, so rather than fight against his own countrymen, he determined to hide till an opportunity presented itself for him to get away.

An Italian lady, also living here, helped him to carry out his resolve, and for fifteen months he never once moved outside the little room he slept in.

His friend would bring him by stealth food and drink once a week, and so cleverly did she manage it, that no one in the house even knew he was still there. Of course it would have meant death for her if she had been caught helping him to evade fighting in the Austrian Army.

His feelings, he told us, were indescribable when he learned that at last the Italians were approaching and his deliverance was at hand.

No wonder the poor fellow wanted to have a talk with someone ; he had not spoken to a living soul

all those long months when Gorizia was being bombarded daily.

He offered to act as our guide and show us round, and we gladly accepted, as it was a chance to see something of the city before its aspect was changed by the Italian occupation.

The Corso and the adjoining streets were still almost deserted, but there were indications that this was not going to last long, and that more troops would shortly be arriving.

We learned that the regiments that had first entered the city had scarcely remained an hour. No sooner did they arrive than they were off again, as it was hoped to cut off the retreat of the flying Austrians. Only a rearguard had been left to await the arrival of reinforcements to take possession of the city itself.

An order had been immediately issued that the inhabitants were to remain indoors, the severest penalty being threatened for any breach of this mandate.

It was somewhat surprising, considering how deserted the streets appeared, to learn that there were several thousand inhabitants still there.

We had thought we had the streets quite to ourselves as we strolled along in the middle of the roadway, our footsteps awakening the echoes; so it came as a nasty shock to suddenly realise that all the time we were thinking this we were being glared at from the little lattices in the shuttered windows above us on either side.

Hundreds of eyes full of malevolence followed our every movement. You had, after this, the uncanny sensation that at any moment you might be shot at from some upper storey.

The city was quite attractive, and one was not surprised it was called the "Austrian Nice," and that it had been a very delightful and gay place to

live in. There were several fine buildings, and a park with the inevitable bandstand.

It was to a great extent an Italian city of some 25,000 inhabitants, and its picturesque surroundings and genial climate made it a favourite health resort. Our guide told us that it was largely inhabited by retired Austrian officers with their families, many having built themselves villas in the faubourgs.

The story of Gorizia being in ruins in consequence of the Italian bombardment was evidently spread by the Austrians. There was, of course, a good deal of damage done, but nothing like one had been led to expect. I should say that on the day it was captured not more than a hundred houses had suffered at all.

Since then, of course, its wilful bombardment with shells of heavy calibre by the Austrians is causing an immense amount of damage, and exacting a daily toll of death among the inhabitants, most of whom, as I have pointed out, are actually Austrians.

Whilst we were taking our walk, the Austrian guns had not been idle by any means, and the crash of explosions in the streets around indicated that the peril of the women and children living in the houses was actually accentuated by the entry of the Italians. It was a glaring instance of the mentality of the pure-bred Austrian or German.

Our newly-found Italian friend suggested that probably from the Castle we could obtain a fine view of the positions and the fighting north of the town. So we went in that direction.

The Castle, or as it is called there, the " Schloss," of Gorizia, stands on a steep hill which dominates the older part of the city ; steep, narrow, cobble-paved streets lead up to it. We soon found that this quarter was the " danger zone," and that one ran more risk here than anywhere else.

The shells were bursting all around, and one could not help a feeling of deep pity for the unfortunate people who were thus suffering at the hands of their own people.

The Austrians might have averred, and I believe they afterwards did, that they were firing on the Castle, though with what object it is difficult to understand, since it is merely an archæological monument ; anyhow, every time they missed it they hit the town, so there is nothing more to be said.

It was a bit of a climb, and as I had hobnails in my boots I was sliding all over the road.

One part of the street was very old and picturesque, with a low parapet on one side and a fine view from it towards the Austrian positions.

It was a very hot corner to get past as it was quite exposed to rifle fire, so we had to take it singly, crouching down and at the double, an awkward and undignified performance when one is inclined to *embonpoint.*

The street now narrowed considerably, with lofty houses on either side. We stopped for a few moments in the middle of the road to get our breath. Just behind us was a house built on low solid arches such as one sees everywhere in Italy.

Suddenly we heard the screeching wail of a big shell approaching.

With one accord we made a bolt for the shelter of the arches, and were only just in time ; with a report like a thunderclap the projectile burst on the house above us, and a huge mass of masonry and bricks came tumbling down with a crash in the roadway just where we had been standing.

A cloud of dust blotted out everything, and for a moment I thought that the whole building would come down and bury us all under it, but fortunately it was stout enough to withstand the shock.

We waited a moment, on the alert, in case another

shell came over, and then, without further ado, we deferred our visit to the Castle and made a dash down the street for the comparatively safe regions below.

But our adventures were not yet over even here. We were walking through one of the wide main streets when we heard bombs exploding close by—there is no mistaking the difference between the explosion of a shell and that of an aeroplane bomb.

We looked up—a " Taube " had spotted us and was slowly circling overhead directly above us. Just where we happened to be at that particular moment there was not a recess or a corner anywhere near where we could take shelter ; we tried the doors of the houses but they were all locked.

There was nothing for it therefore but to chance to luck, and we stood gazing up as though transfixed at the beastly thing hovering above us like some bird of prey.

Then suddenly we saw something bright drop from it. Instinctively we flattened ourselves against the wall. There was the loud report of an exploding bomb in an adjoining street—it had missed us by a great many yards.

The machine then veered off in another direction, and we were not under its " fire " again, but it was a real bit of a " thrill " while it lasted.

As we then made our way back towards the café, we heard the plaintive whining of a dog abandoned inside one of the big houses. We stopped and called it. Its efforts to get out were pitiful, but there was no chance of its being rescued as the door was a massive porte-cochère, and the ground floor windows were heavily barred.

There was nothing to be done. We walked on, one of my comrades calling out in a husky voice, with the genuine feeling of a lover of dumb animals :

" Que veux tu mon pauvre vieux ? C'est la guerre !"

A great change had already come over the central part of the city even during the time we had been for our walk.

The Italian flag had been run up on all the principal buildings. Troops were evidently being brought up as quickly as possible, and the Corso was blocked with cavalry.

In all the streets leading from the river, infantry in full campaigning kit was advancing in Indian file and keeping as close up to the walls as they could. The lines of soldiers on both sides of the street seemed positively interminable, and the men appeared to be in the highest spirits.

It was all deeply stirring, and you could not help having the feeling that you were witnessing history being made before your eyes.

The soldiers behaved magnificently, as however might have been expected of the heroes they were. There was not the slightest sign anywhere of any disposition to "swagger" or show off either on the part of the officers or men; they simply came in quietly and took possession of Gorizia like an army of gentlemen.

To the inhabitants caged up in their houses, and peeping from their shuttered windows, the remarkable scene could have been little short of a revelation. This unostentatious entry of the Italian troops must indeed have been very different to what they had expected.

I tried to picture in my mind what would have taken place had the Austrians succeeded in getting into Vicenza!

Strange and unexpected incidents could be witnessed everywhere. In a narrow side street I saw a regiment coming along, the men marching like athletes; at their head was the Colonel, a fine, grey-haired old fellow as alert in bearing as any of his subalterns.

The men were halted, and there was a hurried consultation of the map. The Colonel was evidently in a quandary. I understood he was in doubt as to which was the quickest way out of the city to get to San Marco.

To my surprise, then, a young Italian girl came from one of the houses and boldly gave him the necessary information, whilst out of the windows all round one saw eyes glaring down on her with impotent fury.

In the street where this took place many of the houses had been damaged by shells, and in several instances the shop fronts were so wrecked that everything that was left intact could have been easily got at through the broken windows ; it only meant putting your hand in and helping yourself, since there was no one that day to stop you, and several of the shops had quite tempting displays of goods, yet I did not hear of a single case of looting ; this, I fancy, was evidence of a remarkable state of affairs, and which reflected additional credit on the soldiers.

A curious little scene was witnessed at the Town Hall when the representatives of the Italian Government took over the place and the municipal archives.

A number of Gorizia's civil dignitaries, together with their womenfolk, put in an appearance. Many of the people had not seen each other for days during the height of the fighting, and their joy at meeting again, though under such altered circumstances, was quite touching, and there was a lot of embracing and weeping.

One or two of the younger women were smartly dressed and very good looking. They looked a bit nervous at first, but this soon wore off when they found we meant them no harm.

One in particular, with whom I had a chat, as she spoke French fluently, was distinctly an attractive

personality, and was dressed as daintily as any Parisienne.

I asked if she and her girl friends were not horribly frightened by the noise of the battle and the arrival of the Italian troops.

No, they were not, she replied emphatically, because the Austrian officers, before going away, had told them they had nothing to fear, as they would be back within a week with half a million troops and drive the Italians out again.

She was so good looking, and was so confident this would really happen, that we had not the heart to try and convince her otherwise.

She was beginning to tell us some of her experiences during the bombardment when one of the staff officers came up and whispered to us that it was not advisable that day to talk too much with the inhabitants. Almost needless to add we took the hint.

Carabinieri were already on guard here at the entrance to the building, and from their stolid, impassive demeanour one would have thought they were part and parcel of the municipality of Gorizia. Here is an example of their all-round handiness.

In an adjoining street a big house had been set on fire by a shell, and had been burning for three days we were told. There was no water available to put it out with, and the inhabitants of the houses round were in terror in case it should spread.

The *Carabinieri* did not stand looking on, but took the matter in hand without hesitation, found out where the fire pump was kept, cleared the street, and in a very short time were fixing up a water supply.

But the occasions when the *Carabinieri* were *en evidence* were legion.

On the broad pavement outside the Café during the hot afternoon their Colonel and one of his

officers held a sort of rough-and-ready court of enquiry. Chairs were brought out and placed under the trees, and three civilian " suspects " were brought up to undergo a summary sort of cross-examination.

It was a very unconventional and curious scene, and brought significantly home to one the tragic power that can be wielded by a conqueror.

In this instance, however, there was no fear of any injustice or cruelty being inflicted on prisoners. They would get a fair trial at the hands of the Italians, no matter what they had done to warrant their being arrested.

The three " suspects " in this instance—a man, a woman and a little girl—did not look very terrible, rather the contrary in fact, and one wondered what they were " suspected " of doing.

The man, a tall, young fellow with long hair, was dressed in such extraordinary fashion that this in itself may have caused him to be looked on with suspicion. He had a panama straw hat, a dark Norfolk jacket, white shirt with very large, low-cut collar outside his coat collar, and no tie, white flannel knickerbockers, blue socks, and black side-spring boots. The woman and the little girl were typically Austrian.

I could not find out why they had been arrested, but as they were taken away by the *Carabinieri* after their examination it was presumably a somewhat serious matter. It was certain beforehand that the city would be infested with spies, so no chances were to be taken, and rightly so.

During the course of the afternoon the city was completely occupied by troops, and there had not been a hitch in the victorious advance. One saw soldiers everywhere—cavalry, infantry, Bersaglieri cyclists ; in fact, almost every branch of the Army.

In every open space and in the courtyards of the

principal public buildings were bivouacs, all being carried out in the usual methodic manner of the Italians. The troops had the streets entirely to themselves, as no civilians were allowed out of doors that day, and none of the shops were open.

Towards evening the Austrians recommenced heavily shelling the city, aeroplanes began to put in an appearance, as if a big counter-attack was coming, but it died out suddenly for some unexplained reason.

It was now time for us to be thinking of getting back to Udine, as Barzini had to send off his despatch and I had my sketches to work up. We had a longish walk before us to Lucinico, but there was no particular need to hurry, so we made our way slowly to the wooden bridge we had crossed in the morning.

I was loaded with trophies I hoped to take back to London; a rifle slung over my shoulder, an Austrian knapsack full of heavy rubbish on my back, and in my hand a much battered Gorizia policeman's helmet, something like a *pickelhaube*, in black with a silver spike, which we had picked up in the street.

There were a good many soldiers round about the bridge, and my appearance between our soldier chauffeur and his friend excited much unpleasant comment as we elbowed our way through the crowd. I was evidently mistaken for an Austrian spy in custody.

It was much quieter now along the river. The firing which continued in a desultory way being directed further down stream, so there was no necessity to rush across the bridge this time, though it was advisable not to dally, as one could not tell what might come screeching over at any moment.

We retraced our steps by the road we had previously come. Nothing was changed yet: the dead

were still lying about everywhere, but at the archway under the railway embankment soldiers were already beginning to clear the place.

General Marazzi, who was still there, advisd use not to take the road across the battlefield, as it was being heavily shelled at the moment ; in fact, had it not been for the protection afforded by the high embankment, it would have been very uncomfortable here ; as it was, every moment I quite expected something to burst over us.

We made our way, therefore, by a sunken pathway amongst the bushes and small trees that skirted the foot of the embankment for some distance ; a procession of soldiers, carrying wounded men, leading the way. This gulley had evidently been exposed to the full fire of the Italian batteries during the battle.

From end to end it was a gruesome spectacle of foulness and death. The Austrians had evidently used it as a sort of back exit from their trenches, and whilst beating a retreat in this direction had found it a veritable cul de sac, from which there was no escape.

Lucinico was full of movement when we got back there : troops coming in, motor ambulances arriving, and numbers of officers' cars waiting. A start had also been made at clearing the *débris* of ruin from the road, so no time was being lost. Wounded were being brought in continually, and one saw them lying about on stretchers everywhere, waiting for the Red Cross men to come along.

With difficulty we managed to get our car through the block of vehicles and masses of soldiers, and headed for Udine. Then commenced what, to my mind, was the most impressive spectacle of this wondrous day.

For the next thirty miles along the road there was an unbroken line of troops and military transport

of every conceivable description coming towards us through a dense haze of dust in the golden light of the setting sun.

It was a victorious army advancing slowly but irresistibly, like a flow of lava, and made a glorious *finale* to a page of history.

The soldiers round us now began to move forward, and we were practically carried up the gully with them (*see page* 219)

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CHAPTER XVII

AFTER Gorizia—Method and thoroughness of General Cadorna—Amusing story —Result of the three days fighting—Employment for first time of cavalry and cyclists —Udine reverts to its usual calm—Arrival of visitors —Lord Northcliffe and others—Mr. Whitney Warren —Changes along the fighting Front—Monte San Michéle—A misleading statement—" Big events " pending—A visit to Gorizia—My companions—Great change visible on road—Battlefield cleared away—Gorizia—Deserted streets—Rules and regulations for the inhabitants—The two cafés open—Rumours of counter-attack—The General's Headquarters—Somewhat scant courtesy—A stroll round—We decide spend night in Gorizia—The deserted Hotel—We take possession of rooms—A jolly supper party—A glorious summer night —One long hellish tatoo—The Austrian counter-attack—A night of discomfort—The noise from the trenches—The cause of my " restlessness " —The " comfortable " beds—Gorizia in the early morning—Indifferent to the bombardment—Back to Udine via Savogna, Sdraussina and Sagrado—Panorama of military activity—Monte San Michêle—Looking for a needle in a bundle of hay—The cemeteries—The pontoon bridge—The Austrian trenches—The cavalry division—Renewed shelling of Gorizia.

CHAPTER XVII

TO describe what took place during the next few days might appear somewhat in the nature of an anti-climax were it not that there was no standing still on the part of the Italians. The Austrians would doubtless have gladly welcomed some respite, but they were not going to get it, as was soon realised.

The method and thoroughness of General Cadorna were displayed in every move, and it is probably no exaggeration to state that even in the most minute details everything had been reckoned upon, so that had the unexpected unfortunately happened, he would not have been taken unawares at any point.

I was told an interesting and amusing incident which conveys a good idea of this method and thoroughness, which is so characteristic of the Generalissimo.

On July 17th, 1915, the Mayor of Pavia, who is at present a captain of artillery, wrote to General Cadorna offering to present a silk Italian flag to the city of Gorizia the day it was occupied by the Italians. General Cadorna replied humorously: "Keep it in pepper for the present." (Evidently as a preservative against moth).

The Mayor had quite forgotten the incident, when to his surprise, on the 10th August, 1916, the day after the fall of Gorizia, he received the following telegram from General Cadorna:

In reference to your letter of the 17th July, 1915, if you like you can send or bring what you offer. Salutations.

CADORNA.

Every hour almost brought further confirmation of the magnitude of the victory that had been achieved

by the Duke of Aosta's third army. During the three days fighting, 15,393 prisoners, including 350 officers, amongst whom were 20 senior officers, had been taken ; 16 guns, a large number of machine guns, and an immense quantity of ammunition and *materiel* of every description.

Nor was this all ; the entire front was now re-adjusted, and the Austrians driven out of positions they had got to look upon as impregnable. They had paid particular attention to the fortifications of Gorizia, and had made the place a strategic centre round which they had concentrated important forces.

It transpired that orders were given for the evacuation of the city some twenty-four hours before the bridge-head, the key to the whole position, was lost, which proved they realized the straits they were in ; and it is certain that this state of affairs was pretty well known to General Cadorna.

Not the least interesting feature of the operations was the employment for the first time of masses of cavalry and the famous Bersaglieri cyclists, who preceded the advance of the main body of troops beyond the Isonzo, and from all accounts did most excellent work. I was fortunate enough to get some interesting sketches of the cavalry crossing the river under fire.

In Udine, after the first flush of excitement had worn off, everything reverted to its usual calm. The inhabitants took a remarkably sober view of the situation, and it was realized that the victory of Gorizia, glorious though it undoubtedly was, was but a step further on the hard uphill road to final victory, and the flags were therefore not left up more than 48 hours.

The importance of what Italy is doing was evidently being realized now, as several English visitors arrived in Udine during the next few days

n flying visits ; amongst others Lord North-liffe, Mr. H. G. Wells, and Mr. Harold Cox, also group of Spanish correspondents, and a very harming and erudite American citizen, Mr. Whitney Warren, the distinguished New York architect and embre de l'Institut de France.

He was bubbling over with enthusiasm for the ause of the Entente, and had a grip of the aims and oings of the war that made him at once a delightful nd sympathetic comrade and a distinct addition to he Censorship Club.

The fall of Gorizia brought about such changes long the fighting front that there was little fear, for he present at any rate, of any further period of tagnation so far as work for the correspondents was concerned ; we looked like being " full up " for some time.

On the Carso, Monte San Michele had been captured after a desperate assault and hand to hand fighting, simultaneously with the Gorizia bridge-head, so the long-standing menace and which had hitherto barred any possibility of an advance in this direction was removed.

The potentialities opened up therefore by the conquest of the portal, as it were, of the Carso, were immense ; and it is certain that no one knew this better than the Austrians themselves, for next to the actual bridge-head there was no position to which they attached more importance than that of Monte San Michele.

I regret to have to be at variance with the distinguished English correspondent who wrote of the " towering mountains " and " beetling crags " of the Carso ; but I must point out, if only to convey some sense of proportion, that Monte San Michele which is the highest point in this part of the Carso, is only 275 metres in altitude, and cannot therefore by the wildest stretch of imagination be described

as anything but a lofty hill ; as a matter of fact, there are no greater eminences in the entire Carso area than 450 metres.

Monte San Michele, in spite, however, of not being a " mountain," dominated the whole of this portion of the valley of the lower Isonzo, so it would be difficult to overestimate what its loss meant to the Austrians.

Its elimination form their line of defence in this direction gave the Italians a secure tenure of the towns of Gradisca and Sagrado, which for fifteen months had only nominally been in their possession owing to their being constantly under the fire of the Austrian batteries on its crest. These two towns now became habitable for troops and available as centres for Red Cross work.

It was rumoured that more " big events " were pending in the near future in this quarter ; one was therefore constantly motoring out there in order to gain a clear conception of what was taking place. There was now so much of interest along the new line of Front that I did not remain in Udine any longer than was necessary to work on my sketches and get them passed by the Censor.

A few days after the fall of Gorizia I motored over there with Baccio Bacci, of the *Nuovo Giornale*, of Florence, and with Bitetti, of the *Corriere della Sera* (of whom I have already spoken), as chauffeur, to see how things were looking there. Not a week had elapsed since the victory, yet the changes along the road were simply incredible, and reflected enormous credit on the organization of the *troupes sanitaires* (the sanitation brigade) The iron bridge had been so damaged by the Austrian curtain fire that it was out of commission for the time being, so we had perforce to go by the road Barzini and I had taken.

I therefore had an opportunity of judging for

myself what had been accomplished in five days. The village of Lucinico had now been so cleared of *débris* that there was no longer any occasion to leave the car. We found to our surprise that the road was quite open all the way to Gorizia, across the battle-field round by Podgora and through Grafenberg.

The Austrians were still busy sending big shells over at intervals, and a car just ahead of us had a very narrow escape ; it was little short of a miracle it was not blown to pieces, and it makes me feel cold when I think of it.

The change everywhere was positively bewildering ; if I had not seen it for myself I should never have believed it possible. With the exception of the ruined houses and the shattered trunks of the trees there was no trace remaining of the battle.

The trenches had been filled in, thus forming ready-made graves for the dead ; the wreckage of barbed-wire entanglements ; the shell-holes, the gruesome litter of blood-stained garments ; all had disappeared as though by magic.

Perhaps, though, the most startling transformation was to be seen at the archway under the railway I described in a previous chapter. It was positively unrecognizable.

Everything had been cleared away. Unless you had seen it before, you would never have believed that this very commonplace tunnel for the road under the embankment, such as one sees everywhere and through which we drove without stopping, was less than a week before the elaborately fitted-up Headquarters and domicile of an Austrian General and his staff.

The store-house in which I had seen the ghastly array of human packages was now but an ordinary empty shed, the kitchen close by only a simple wooden hut, the very last place one would have expected to find an elaborate cuisine in.

To my companion this meant nothing, as it was the first time he had come this way, but I must confess to a slight feeling of disappointment that there should have been so much haste to remove all traces of Austrian Military Kultur.

I felt I should have liked to see it all again, though I suppose had I been able to, the impression would not have been the same as it was on that morning when the place had only just been vacated by the Austrians and the battlefield was, as it were, still red-hot.

There was nothing to stop for in Grafenberg, so we drove straight on till we came to a wooden bridge which brought us right into Gorizia. This was one of the bridges which had been partially destroyed on the day of the battle, but was now repaired.

With the exception of soldiers, the streets were deserted ; there was not a civilian to be seen anywhere, and the shops were still closed, the inhabitants, it appeared, only being allowed out of doors a few hours during the daytime. I think it was for two hours in the morning, and the same in the afternoon ; after dark no inhabitant was allowed in the streets under any pretext. This system saved a lot of difficult policing, and gave the troops greater freedom of movement.

We found that two cafes were open now, the " Grosses " and another next to the Theatre, but they were practically deserted. Coffee was about all you could get to drink ; wine and beer being quite out of the question, and food also, as we discovered later.

We arrived somewhat late in the afternoon, but the evenings were still long, and there was a full moon, so we knew there would be no difficulty in getting back to Udine even if we remained till after dark.

It was rumoured that the Austrians were going

to make a big counter-attack on Gorizia that night, and it was with the idea of perhaps seeing something interesting and getting some good " copy " that we had come. Luckily, as will be seen, we ran across a *confrère*, Arnaldo Fraccaroli, of the *Corriere della Sera*, who had driven in earlier in the afternoon with the same idea as ourselves, and he joined us, as the man he had come with was returning to Udine at once.

But for reasons which we were unable to fathom, it was soon pretty evident that we were not wanted in Gorizia that day.

At the Headquarters of the General in a big house on the Corso, we were received by an aide-de-camp with but scant courtesy ; in fact, this was my first experience of anything of the kind in Italy, and was the more surprising as we all represented important papers, and our passes were in order in every respect. We were curtly informed, after being kept waiting in the street for some time, that the General was " out " ; so we decided to go for a walk and return later.

Except that more damage had been done by shells, there was little or no change in the streets, and from what we could gather there was little likelihood of the city resuming its normal aspect for a very long time ; such of the inhabitants as could get away were doing so, and the Italian authorities were putting no obstacles in their way ; as a matter of fact, Gorizia was not a place for non-combatants, as it was continually being bombarded.

When we got back to the General's Headquarters we found he had returned, but it was, however, one thing finding him in, quite another matter getting him to receive us.

After again being kept waiting outside the garden gate till it was almost dark, we were coolly told by a sergeant that the General had nothing to tell us,

so could not receive us. This was very disappointing, but there was no help for it. He was evidently peevish about something and did not want visitors.

We walked away slowly through the deepening gloom. There was not a light to be seen anywhere. Now and again the loud report of a big gun awakened the echoes of the empty streets.

My companions were much upset at the reception we had received, and were discussing the matter at great length as we went along ; meanwhile I was gradually feeling very hungry and tired and heartily sick of this aimless wandering along in the obscurity.

Suddenly they came to a decision, and announced to me that we were going to spend the night in Gorizia, as it would be a pity to return to Udine and perhaps just miss something important, as there was no doubt, they explained to me, there was something *en l'air*.

Of course I had no opinion to offer in the matter as I understood so little Italian, so there was nothing for it but to fall in with their views. Moreover, there was no possibility of my getting away without them since the car was theirs.

It having, therefore, been decided to remain in Gorizia, the next important question was where to put up for the night.

There was, as I have said, not a light to be seen anywhere ; not a soul was about, the soldiers having long since returned to their quarters. The two cafés were closed, and we were prowling along in the dark like a lot of tramps in a city of the dead.

Had I been able to join in the conversation of my companions I might perhaps have found the adventure amusing, but as it was, from my point of view, it was deadly dull and uninteresting ; however, I tried to buck myself up with the idea that something exciting might happen later, and so it did, as will be seen.

Our car, it appeared, had been left in the entrance of an hotel opposite the theatre, so we made our way there to make sure it was safe. The hotel we found was not locked up, although it was quite deserted. On a table in the vestibule we, fortunately, discovered a piece of candle, and, lighting it, we started to explore the place to see if there was a chance of fixing ourselves up for the night in any of the rooms.

It was a curious experience, and one that I shall long remember. The hotel was quite a large one, and to our astonishment all the rooms were in perfect order, with beds made, water in the jugs and bottles, and soap, towels, everything in fact in readiness for visitors. We could have wished for nothing better, except, perhaps, to have found a whole candle instead of a piece of one ; for the idea of being left in the dark in a short time rather nullified the comfort by which we were surrounded.

There were so many rooms to choose from that we were inclined to be fastidious ; it is not often that one has the run of a whole hotel, and gratis at that ; however, we settled on two, with a sitting room in between and with two beds in each.

Now came the vital subject of supper. My car mates, with their usual inconsequence, had brought nothing at all in the shape of food or drink with them, always relying on " something turning up." I had as usual taken the precaution of putting in my haversack a box of sardines, bread, cheese, chocolate, and my water flask was filled with wine ; but, of course, this was not sufficient for us all.

Then it turned out that after all we were in luck's way. Fraccaroli suddenly recollected that he had had the happy thought of bringing a hamper with him in case of accident, and we found that it had been put in our car when he had joined us.

It was brought in amidst general acclamation,

and on opening it we saw that whoever had packed it had, fortunately for us, had broadminded views as to what one man's appetite should be like. There was ample for four people. Cold meat, cooked ham, butter, bread, fruit, and last, but certainly not least, a magnum bottle of excellent wine.

One could not have wished for a better supper anywhere, and the mere sight of it, when I had arranged it artistically on sheets of newspaper, put us in the highest spirits, and the empty corridors echoed with our laughter as we tackled it, for we were pretty ravenous by now. I am sure that no jollier supper party than ours that night ever took place in Gorizia.

After we had finished, Fraccaroli and Bitetti suggested, as the moon was now up, our having another attempt at seeing the General. Bacci and I, however, thought we had done enough walking for one day, so decided to remain where we were and have a quiet smoke before turning in. The two men, therefore, went out, and we heard their footsteps resounding through the empty corridor and down the staircase with ghostly effect.

We filled our glasses again and lit up our pipes, and then Bacci suggested that as there was only a tiny bit of candle left we might dispense with it for a while as it was brilliant moonlight, so we extinguished it and sat by the open window enjoying the cool breeze. The room looked on to a small courtyard, and facing us was a high wall, so we could not see far.

It was a glorious summer night, and all was so quiet and peaceful that it was difficult for the moment to realise how near were the horrors of war.

It was just the sort of night to engender depth of thought, and we were both in poetic vein, and soliloquizing on the iniquity of warfare while nature was always so beautiful, when the loud report of a

I was fortunate enough to get some interesting sketches of the cavalry crossing the river under fire
(*see page* 238)

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gun rang out in the stillness of the night and brought us back to stern reality. It was so close that had it not been for the wall in front of us we could have seen where it came from.

There were a few seconds of dead silence, and then there broke out the most terrific fusillade it would be possible to imagine ; machine gun and rifle fire mixed up in one long hellish tatoo ; whilst, as though to punctuate the unearthly music, at intervals one heard the isolated bang of trench mortars and the sharp detonation of hand grenades.

The extraordinary suddenness of it all was so remarkable that it was as if it had been timed to commence at a certain minute.

All quietude was now at an end, and although the firing varied in intensity it never ceased. At moments there would be a lull, and it appeared as though about to die out, and then it would recommence with renewed violence.

It could certainly not have been more than a few hundred yards away, so near in fact that now and again one heard shouts and yells, and several stray bullets actually struck the upper part of the hotel.

The fighting was still continuing when our companions returned. They told us that they had found out that this was the commencement of the expected counter-attack, but that so far it was not developing to any serious extent, though what the night might bring forth might alter matters considerably ; anyhow, the Italians were not being taken unawares as the Austrians were discovering.

This was interesting news, and made one feel that we were not spending the night in Gorizia for nothing, and that we might have an exciting time before the morning. For the moment, however, since there was nothing to be seen, we thought the best thing to do was to lie down and have a rest for an hour or so.

Our companions had had an extra bit of luck whilst they were out, in the shape of a whole candle which had been given them, so we ran no further risk of being left in darkness.

Of course we all lay down in our clothes, boots and all, ready for any emergency ; when big " counter attacks " are on the *tapis* it is as well to take no chances.

The beds looked very comfortable, and had clean sheets and pillow cases, but although I was very tired, I could not somehow get to sleep for a long while. I felt a sensation of discomfort which was almost unbearable, and had it not been that I did not wish to disturb my companions, I should have got up and walked about the room.

It is not pleasant lying on a soft bed with all your clothes on, including field boots, on a hot night, and I put my restlessness down to this. However, I managed to doze off fitfully after a while, though for what appeared to be hours I was being continually woke up by what I took to be the noise made by men wearing heavy boots running down the stone stairs and slamming the street door.

This at last woke me completely, when I realized that the noise came from the trenches, and was caused by the rattle of machine guns and rifles and the booming of mortars. I managed to get to sleep after this ; the monotony of the noise ended by exercising a sedative effect on my nerves.

When I awoke it was quite early, but to my surprise I had the rooms to myself, my companions having already gone out. I found them downstairs, and learned that they had passed the night seated in the car ; they had decided that anything was preferable to the " comfortable " beds of the hotel.

I then comprehended the cause of my " restlessness." It was a striking instance of " Where

ignorance is bliss," etc., for I had managed to have a good sleep in spite of it all.

Gorizia, in the early morning sunshine, looked delightful, and everybody we met seemed bright and cheerful like the weather ; and quite indifferent to the bombardment which still continued at intervals. An officer told me that one often ended by trying mentally to calculate what all this senseless waste of ammunition was costing per hour.

Nothing had come of the counter-attack, except to give the Italians a chance of further consolidating their front here, and as there appeared no likelihood of anything important happening that day we arranged to return to Udine forthwith.

Instead, however, of going via Grafenberg, we took the road which follows the left bank of the Isonzo and goes through Savogna, Sdraussina, and Sagrado, as Bacci was anxious to shake hands with a doctor friend of his who was with a field hospital somewhere this way.

This gave us an opportunity of seeing the wonderful cantonments of the troops waiting to advance on the Carso.

From Savogna right on to Sagrado, a distance of, roughly speaking, six miles, was one continuous encampment on either side of the road. A whole army corps must have been gathered here, cavalry, artillery, infantry, motor transport, cyclists and motor ambulances, in endless encampments.

It was as interesting a panorama of military activity as I had seen anywhere on the Italian Front, and was alone worth coming here to see. The troops were fully protected from shell fire, as the road all the way is sheltered by Monte San Michele and the adjacent hills, which tower above the route, so it was possible to construct permanent huts on the slopes of the hill, and also to take advantage of the many caves which are a feature of this region, to quarter the men in.

Monte San Michele, as I shall describe in my next chapter, was captured simultaneously with Gorizia, and one saw from here the formidable series of trenches the Italians, with a courage which will pass into history, constructed and gradually pushed forward up the hill, under the fire of the Austrian guns, until the final assault, when the whole position was taken.

Unless this operation had been successful, no troops would have been here now, as this road was, prior to the victory, a " No man's land."

One saw every phase of soldier life along this interesting road, and one could not fail to be deeply impressed by the extraordinary " completeness," I can think of no other word, of the arrangements on all sides, and the businesslike air of readiness to go anywhere at a moment's notice of every unit. Certain it is that the Austrians had no conception of what was ready for them behind these hills.

It was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay to find any particular field ambulance amongst such a multitude, and the more specially as these ambulance stations are continually being shifted as necessity arises. So, after trying for some time and going backwards and forwards up and down the road in the vicinity of Sdraussina, where we hoped to come across it, we had to give it up as a bad job.

A somewhat striking feature of this vast camping area were the military cemeteries, where hundreds of soldiers' graves were crowded together in serried lines. Of course there is no sentiment in warfare and soldiers live in the midst of death, but it struck me as somewhat unnecessary putting this burial ground alongside a road so frequently traversed by the troops when there is so much space elsewhere.

The Isonzo, which here is a broad, pelucid and swiftly running stream much divided up with grave islets, presented a scene of much animation

hundreds of soldiers were taking advantage of a few hours peaceful interregnum to have a bath and do a day's washing.

We continued on past Sagrado, crossing the river lower down by a newly-placed pontoon bridge below San Pietro dell Isonzo. Here there was no regular road, but merely a rough track leading to the river, and it was only by the skilfulness of our chauffeur friend that the car was got through at all without accident.

Round about here were many Austrian trenches that had been hastily abandoned, so we had a good opportunity for examining them.

They struck me as being constructed on the most approved principles, and were finished in elaborate style with wicker work lining to the walls and along the floors. None of these trenches, however, had ever been used, so it was only possible to hazard conjectures as to their utility.

Just here we met the cavalry division advancing dismounted in Indian file. A fine lot of well-equipped men with very serviceable looking horses.

It may be of interest to mention here that most of the Italian cavalry officers who, as is well known, are magnificent horsemen, ride thoroughbreds of Irish descent.

When we got back to Udine we learned that Gorizia was being heavily shelled from Monte Santo, so it looked as if the Austrians were attempting to destroy it by degrees, as the Huns are doing with Rheims in revenge for losing it.

CHAPTER XVIII

BIG operations on the Carso—General optimism—No risks taken—Great changes brought about by the victory—A trip to the new lines—Gradisca and Sagrado—A walk round Gradisca—Monte San Michele—Sagrado—Disappearance of Austrian aeroplanes and observation balloons—Position of Italian "drachen" as compared with French—On the road to Doberdo—*Moral* of troops—Like at a picnic—A regiment on its way to the trenches—The Italian a "thinker"—Noticeable absence of smoking—My first impression of the Carso—Nature in its most savage mood—The Brighton downs covered with rocks—Incessant thunder of guns—Doberdo hottest corner of the Carso—No troops—Stroll through ruins of street—Ready to make a bolt—A fine view—The Austrian trenches—Shallow furrows—Awful condition of trenches—Grim and barbarous devices—Austrian infamies—Iron-topped bludgeons, poisoned cigarettes, etc.—Under fire—A dash for a dug-out—The imperturbable *Carabinieri*—Like a thunderbolt—A little incident—Brilliant wit—The limit of patience—The Italian batteries open fire—No liberties to be taken—On the way back—Effect of the heavy firing—Motor ambulances—Magnified effect of shell fire on Carso—Rock splinters—Terrible wounds.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL the big operations were now taking place on the Carso, and scarcely a day passed without news of progress in that direction. The official *communiqués* were, therefore, of the most cheery description, and their cheerfulness was reflected all over the town.

Everybody was optimistic, and one was continually hearing rumours of the surprises in store for the Austrians during the next few weeks.

That many of these rumours materialised was undeniable, but it was soon realised that the conquest of the Carso is a very tough job, and will require a lot of patience and necessitate much hard fighting for every yard of ground ; which obviously also meant much great sacrifice of gallant lives unless the advance is carried out methodically and without undue haste. In this respect General Cadorna may be relied on, and also to take no risks of failure.

The Carso, therefore, presented the chief point of interest after the fall of Gorizia, as every advance there means progress towards the main objective, Trieste. Scarcely a day passed now without a car from the Censorship going in the direction of the fighting line. I was therefore constantly able to make excursions, and was gradually filling up my sketch book with interesting subjects.

I may mention that no difficulty whatever was put in my way, and so long as I could find a car to take me, I was at liberty to go where I chose and stay away as long as I liked ; it would have been impossible to have been treated with greater courtesy and regard, and I shall never be sufficiently grateful for it.

The changes brought about by the victory and the brilliant strategy of General Cadorna were so widespread that they would have been unbelievable if one had not seen it all for oneself a few days after the battle. In fact, it was almost at once that the results were discernable. You realized it yourself as soon as you reached certain well-known points which had hitherto been inside the danger zone. The sense of relief at being able to move about freely and without having to keep your ears cocked all the time, listening for shells coming over, was very pleasant.

With a little party of *confrères* I motored out to the new Italian lines within a few hours of their re-adjustment.

Most of the places we went through in order to get close up to the fighting had only become accessible since the fall of Gorizia, whilst others, as for instance Sagrado, and Gradisca, were now almost peaceful after months of constant bombardment.

Gradisca interested me very particularly, as I had lively recollections of the flying visit I had paid to it the preceding year when, as I have described in a previous chapter, our cars to get there had to run the gauntlet of the fire of the batteries on Monte San Michele.

Now the Austrian guns were well out of range, and the little town was quite delightfully peaceful in comparison, and you could wander as you pleased under the big trees in the park, round the band-stand, and fancy you were waiting for the music to commence ; or through the grass-grown, deserted streets and take note of the wanton damage done by the Austrians to their own property.

Monte San Michele, at the back of the town, was now but a very ordinary and unpicturesque hill in the distance, and from the military standpoint no longer of any importance whatever.

The town itself was rapidly being occupied, and inhabited ; several of the big buildings were being transformed into first line hospitals, and the General of the division had already fixed up his headquarters here.

All these changes conveyed more to me than any *communiqués* had done ; I saw for myself what had been accomplished since I was last there, and there was no doubting the evidence of my own eyes.

At Sagrado, on the lower Isonzo, a similar condition of affairs existed ; but here it was my first visit, as it was inaccessible the previous year. A one-time beautiful little town, I should say, typically Austrian, it is true, but nevertheless from all accounts a very pleasant place to live in.

All the river frontage at the present time is nothing but a shapeless heap of ruins ; the magnificent bridge and the elaborate system of locks are irreparably damaged.

Fortunately a considerable portion of the town escaped damage by the shells, and this was now crowded with troops. Yet, barely a week before, it was practically uninhabitable except at enormous risk.

Not the least significant of changes one noticed on the way to the lines was the complete disappearance of Austrian aeroplanes. There had been a few over Gorizia on the great day, but here there appeared to be none at all, and the " Caproni " now held undisputed sway in the air.

As to the observation balloons, the " Drachen," they had all along been noticeable by their absence ; as a matter of fact, I don't recollect ever seeing any of these aerial look-outs over the Austrian lines at any time, the reason for this deficiency being perhaps that they were not found to sufficiently fulfil their purpose.

The Italians evidently thought differently, and

their " drachen " were to be seen everywhere, and along this front in particular.

In this connection I could not fail to note how much further behind the lines they are stationed here as compared with their usual position on the French Front. There may be some very simple explanation of this, but it appeared to me as a layman that they lost a lot of their utility by being always so distant from the Austrian lines.

We were bound for Doberdo, the village on the Carso that was being mentioned every day in the *communiqués*. From Sagrado we went by way of Fogliano, the road skirting the railway most of the way. We were now on the confines of a region of universal havoc and desolation.

War had swept across the country-side with the devastating effect of a prairie fire. Nothing had escaped it. All the villages we passed through were only names now, and nothing remained but ruins to indicate where they had been ; of inhabitants, of course, there was not so much as a trace.

In spite, however, of the general devastation, troops were to be seen everywhere, and numbers were camping even among the ruins with the utmost unconcern ; in fact, you couldn't fail to notice that the *moral* of the men was wonderful, and that they seemed as cheerful as if at a picnic.

The Italian soldier struck me as having a happy faculty for making the best of everything, so hardships do not seem to trouble him, and the equivalent of " grousing " is, as I have already stated, an unknown word in his vocabulary.

This was particularly observable here, though, of course, the glorious weather may have had some thing to do with it ; but the fact remained that they were supporting exceptional hardships with a stoicism that was quite remarkable, I thought.

Along the road at one place we passed a regiment

The only difficulty the officers experienced was in getting them to advance with caution (see page 273)

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halted on its way to the trenches. The men, all apparently very young, were sitting or lying about on either side of the road. We had to slow down in order to get past, so I had an opportunity to take a mental note of the scene.

It was the more interesting to me as I knew that these men were fully aware that in a couple of hours or so they would be in the thick of the hottest fighting. Nevertheless, I could see no trace of any nervous excitement, though the guns were booming in the distance ; they might have all been case-hardened old warriors, so far as you could outwardly judge from their stolid demeanour.

Many were taking advantage of the halt to snatch a few minutes sleep, whilst others were writing letters. There was very little of the grouping together or chatting one would have expected to see. The Italian of to-day is becoming a " thinker."

But what struck me perhaps most of all was the quite noticeable absence of smoking. Probably every other man in an English or French regiment under the circumstances would have had a pipe or a cigarette in his mouth, and would have considered the hardships increased tenfold if he hadn't been able to enjoy a smoke. Here the men in the field don't seem to look upon tobacco as an absolute necessity ; so far as I could judge ; and one seldom sees them smoking on the march, like the French *poilu*, or the English Tommy.

About a mile and a half past Fogliano we took a road that went by an archway under the railway embankment, and brought us a few hundred yards on to a heap of rubble that had once been a little village named Redipuglia, if I remember rightly.

On our right was the much talked of Monte Cosich, a hill that had been the scene of innumerable desperate fights, and facing us was the commencement of the Carso.

I shall never forget my first impression of this shell-swept waste ; for what I had already seen of it was only from a distance, and though through powerful binoculars, one was not really able to form any conception of what it is like in reality. I had been prepared to see Nature in its most savage mood, but the scene before me was so terrible in its utter desolation as to inspire a sense of awe.

Imagine the Brighton downs covered from end to end with colourless stones and rock instead of turf ; no sign of vegetation anywhere ; ribbed in every direction with trenches protected by low, sand-bagged walls ; bristling with wire entanglements, and everywhere pitted with huge shell-craters.

Even then you have only a faint conception of what war means on the Carso, and the awful character of the task the Italians have had before them for the past eighteen months.

There is certainly nothing to compare with it on any of the other Fronts ; for here nature appears to have connived at the efforts of man, and every hollow and every hummock form as it were potential bastions. The incessant thunder of the guns in the distance seemed, as it were, to be in keeping with the utter desolation of the scene.

The road gradually ascended for about a couple of miles, till we at last arrived on the plateau of Doberdo, and close to all that remains of the village.

Fighting was going on only a short distance away in the direction of Nova Vas, so we were under fire here, as shrapnel was bursting all round the village, and at times in amongst the ruins as well.

Doberdo was then reputed to be the hottest corner of the Carso, and one literally took one's life into one's hands when going there.

But it was, nevertheless, so absorbingly interesting that it compensated for the risk one was taking,

and there was a weird sort of fascination in listening to the booming of the guns and watching the shells bursting.

There were no troops here, only some officers and a few soldiers, for the village was far too much exposed for actual occupation ; but it was on the road to the trenches, so it was to a certain extent " occupied " for the moment. There was also a Field Dressing Station, where a few devoted Red Cross men were working under conditions of ever-present peril.

Every yard almost of the ground had been shelled, and it was pock-marked with craters of all sizes. In fact, the wonder was that even a particle of the village was left standing.

We left the car under the shelter of the remnant of a wall, and strolled along what had evidently been the main street ; but it was not altogether what one would term a pleasant stroll, for the stench of unburied dead was in the air, and horrible sights faced you on all sides.

We proceeded very gingerly and ready to make a bolt for cover whenever we heard the warning screech of an approaching shell. There was really not more to see at one end of the street than the other, but one feels just a little bit restless standing still under fire, so we started off on a look round.

At the end of the village there was a fine view looking towards Oppachiasella on the left, and Monte Cossich and the road by which we had come up on the right. One was, therefore, able to judge for oneself what fighting in this arid wilderness means.

You had the impression of gazing on the scene of an earthquake, so little semblance to anything recognizable was there in sight. Here and there a black and gaping hole on the hillside indicated the entrance to one of the famous Carso caves, which are so characteristic a feature of the region.

What was left of the Austrian trenches after the Italian artillery had done with them was sufficient to convey an idea of the awful time their occupants must have passed through ; you had the idea that any human beings who survived after being in such an inferno deserved peace and quietude to the end of their days.

In many cases these trenches were only a few yards apart, so the courage necessary to take them by direct assault must have been extraordinary. One could see the dead lying in between them. The peculiar rock formation of the whole area precludes any making of actual trenches except with enormous labour ; to obviate this shallow furrows are formed and protected with stone parapets, finished with sand-bags (or rather bags of small stones, as, of course, there is no sand here).

The condition of these parapets and " trenches " after continual pounding with high explosives may be left to the imagination. A gruesome detail must be mentioned : so difficult is it to excavate the ground here that the dead are not being " buried " but simply covered over with stones.

Many grim and barbarous devices for causing death in the most horrible and unexpected form were discovered in the Austrian trenches here on the Doberdo plateau, and the mere sight of them was often sufficient to rouse the Italian soldiers to a pitch of frenzy.

One is apt to forget at times that the Austrian is by nature quite as callous and inhuman a creature as the Hun, but here one had ample reminder of what he is capable of when he realises that he is up against a better man than himself.

It is of historic interest in this connection to recount a few of the new infamies these apt disciples of the Hun have introduced : the poisoned cigarettes and shaving brushes left in the trenches ; the

bombs under dead bodies; explosive bullets; baccilli of typhoid dropped from aeroplanes; and the iron-topped bludgeons.

The latter instrument of torture, for it is nothing less, is quite one of the latest devices of Austrian "Kultur" for putting a wounded adversary to death. The iron head is studded with jagged nails, and has a long spike let into the end. No South Sea cannibal ever devised a more awful weapon.

I was lucky enough to get one and brought it back to London, where it makes a fitting pendant in my studio to another barbaric "souvenir" of the war, one of the Hun "*proclamations*" put on the walls in Rheims before the battle of the Marne.

However, to revert to Doberdo. We stood for some little while at the end of the village endeavouring to grasp the import of the various strategic points we could discern from here, when all of a sudden the Austrian batteries started a furious bombardment in our direction with apparently no object whatever, except perhaps that our car had been seen, and they hoped to stop any further movement on the road.

We could see shell after shell bursting with wonderful precision on either side, and in the centre, of the road. Then they must have spotted our little group, for the range was shortened and we found ourselves apparently receiving the polite attention of all the guns.

My two companions made a dash for a sort of dug-out which was close by, and I was about to follow them when I happened to glance round and saw a *carabinieri* standing right out in the road a few yards away, as imperturbably as though it was a slight shower of rain passing over. He was looking in my direction, and I fancied I caught a twinkle of amusement in his eyes at my hurry.

In an instant the thought flashed through my

mind : if it doesn't matter to him remaining in the open why should it to me ? So I climbed back on to the road, trying the while to appear as though I had never really intended to take shelter.

I had scarcely regained my feet when I heard the wail of an approaching shell, and then the peculiar and unmistakable sound of a big shrapnel about to burst overhead.

I only just had time to put my arm up to protect my eyes when it exploded. It was like a thunderbolt, and so close that I heard pieces of metal strike the ground all round me.

A moment elapsed and footsteps approached. Turning round I saw a soldier I had not noticed before ; he was fumbling with something in his hands which appeared too hot to hold easily.

Then to my astonishment he said to me with a laugh, and in perfect English : " I think this was addressed to you, Sir," at the same time handing me a jagged little piece of shell.

I was so taken aback at hearing English spoken just at that particular moment that all I found to say to him in reply to his brilliant wit was the idiotic commonplace " Thanks very much," as I took the interesting fragment.

It occurred to me afterwards that he must have thought me a very taciturn and phlegmatic Englishman, but I had just had a very narrow escape and felt a bit shaken up, as may be imagined, so was scarcely in the mood for conversational effort.

We had hoped to have a look at the trenches round the lake of Doberdo, about three-quarters of a mile away from the village, but with the firing so intense and showing every sign of increasing rather than diminishing, it would have been madness to have attempted to get there, as it was right out in the open. In fact, there was considerable doubt as

to the advisability of starting on the return journey yet, as the road was in the thick of it.

We had only just been remarking on the extraordinary quiescence of the Italian guns which had not fired a shot since we had been up here, when scarcely were the words out of our mouths than suddenly, as though the limit of patience had been reached, with a terrifying crash, all the batteries near us opened fire.

The result was positively magnificent, and roused one to the pitch of enthusiasm. We could see the shells bursting along the crest of a hill some two thousand yards away with such accuracy of aim that in a few moments there was probably not a yard of the ground that had not been plastered with high explosives ; and anything living that was there must have been battered out of existence.

The Italian Commander had no intention of wasting ammunition, however ; he only wished to show he was allowing no liberties to be taken with him ; for in less than a quarter of an hour the Italian fire ceased with the same suddenness it had started, and notwithstanding that the Austrian guns were still going it as hard as ever.

There was no use waiting indefinitely for the chance of getting away in quietude, so we started off on our return to Sagrado. We had extra passengers in the car now, three officers having asked us to give them a lift part of the way. One could not very well refuse, but it made it a very tight fit.

The road was downhill all the way, and there were one or two awkward turns. The effect of the heavy firing was visible all the way. There were big shell-holes and stones everywhere, so it was impossible to go at any speed, much as we should have liked it.

The only thing to do, therefore, was to sit still and trust to luck. One or two shells burst quite

close by us, but we managed to get out of range safely.

We passed some motor ambulances full of serious casualties from the plateau round Doberdo. Even when there was no actual battle proceeding never a day passed I learned without a constant stream of wounded coming down. The promiscuous shell fire of the Austrians continually taking toll somewhere and helping to keep the ambulances busy and the hospitals full.

I was told in Udine that the wounded coming in from the Carso are usually found to be more seriously injured than those from any other Front ; the explanation of this being that owing to the peculiar character of the rocky surface the effect of a shell exploding is, as it were, magnified several times.

Wounds, therefore, are caused as often by the splinters of rock flying upwards, and ricochets, as from the actual fragments of the projectile itself. It is certain that the majority of the terrible facial injuries are more frequently caused by re-percussion than by direct hits.

As will have been gathered, therefore, the soldiers of Italy in this region of desolation are fighting against two enemies, the Austrians and the Carso.

CHAPTER XIX

DIFFICULTIES Italians have still to contend with on way to Trieste—Italian superior in fighting quality—Dash and reckless courage —Success reckoned by yards—Total number of prisoners taken—A huge seine net—The " call of the wild "—A visit to San Martino del Carso—My companion—Our route—The attraction of the road —Early morning motoring—On our own—The unconventional quarters of the divisional general —The Rubbia-Savogna railway station.—The signalman's cabin—An interesting chat with the General—At our own risk—The big camp on Monte San Michele—The desolate waste of the Carso— An incident—Nothing to sketch—" Ecco San Martino del Carso "—Shapeless dust-covered rubble— The Austrian trenches amongst the ruins—Under fire—Back to Udine—A pleasant little episode— Déjeûner to Colonel Barbarich at Grado—A " day's outing "—The little " Human " touch—The " funk-holes " in the dining room—A trip in a submarine chaser—Things quiet in Udine—A period of comparative inactivity.

CHAPTER XIX

A SINGLE glance at the map to-day—I am writing this in January—is sufficient to give an idea of the enormous difficulties the Italians have still to contend against and surmount in forcing their way across the formidable barrier of stony wilderness between their present position and their obvious objective—Trieste.

It is said that they will find that apart from the terrible character of the natural obstacles, which, as I have endeavoured to show, they are up against, the Austrians have series after series of entrenched lines, each of which will have to be captured by direct assault.

Although it has been seen that man for man the Italian is far and away superior in fighting quality to the Austrian, it cannot be denied that when well supplied with machine guns, and behind positions which afford him almost complete protection, the Austrian soldier will put up a very determined resistance before he gives in. This factor must, therefore, be reckoned with in any commencement of an attempt at an advance.

The dash and reckless courage of the Italians, whilst thoroughly to be relied upon under any circumstances however trying, must always be held, as it were, in leash, otherwise even the smallest forward move will be only achieved at an awful sacrifice of gallant lives. The utmost caution, moreover, will have to be exercised, so as not to fall into a *guet apens*, and every step forward must be fully protected.

When success, therefore, can only be reckoned on, as it were, by yards, it is not surprising to find

on examining the map how slow apparently has been the progress during the past four months ; but it is progress nevertheless, and the most tangible proof of it is contained in the concluding lines of the brief summary issued by the Italian supreme command of the operations from September to December :

" The total of prisoners taken on the Julian Front (*i.e.*, the Isonzo and the Carso) from August to December was 42,000, and the guns numbered 60 and the machine guns 200."

The gradual advance has not been confined to any one particular sector of this Front, but was part of the general scheme which is operating like a huge seine net over this part of the Carso. The interest, therefore, was entirely concentrated in this zone after the fall of Gorizia, and I never missed an opportunity of going in that direction on the chance of getting some good subjects for my sketch book.

I remember some years ago when I was crossing the Gobi desert, I discovered that the desolation of the scene around me exercised an inexplicable sort of fascination, and at times I would have a strange longing to wander away alone into the wilderness.

I experienced somewhat the same sensation on the Carso. It is most probably what Jack London designated the " call of the wild." In this case, however, the fascination was tempered by the knowledge that one's wandering fit might be cut short by an Austrian bullet, so one's peregrinations had perforce to be somewhat curtailed.

There was, of course, much of great interest to see and sketch in the area where active operations were in progress, whilst every day almost there seemed to be something, either in the shape of a rumour, or in the official *communiqué*, that formed a good excuse for getting into a car and heading for the " sound of the guns " again.

They came racing across the stretch of "No man's land" (*see page* 294)

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On one of these occasions I had as my companion Robert Vaucher, the correspondent of the Paris *Illustration*, who had just arrived at the Front for a short visit.

We decided to make for San Martino del Carso, the first village captured by the Italians on the Carso, as it was quite close to the fighting then going on round Oppachiassella.

Our route was via Palmanova, Romans and Sagrado a road one had got to know by heart, so to speak, but of which one never tired, for somehow, curiously enough, everything always seemed novel although you had seen it many times before.

There was also the charm of starting off in a car just after sunrise ; it had a touch of adventure about it that made me feel quite youthful again. I never tired of the long drives ; and in the early morning the air was like breathing champagne.

One frequently had the road to oneself at this hour, and you could have imagined you were on a pleasure jaunt till you heard the booming of the guns above the noise of the engine ; for it did not matter how early one was, the guns never seemed to be silent. With a sympathetic companion in the car these runs out to the lines were quite amongst the pleasantest features of one's life up at the Front.

On this particular occasion the fact of being with someone with whom I could converse freely made it still more agreeable. We went off quite "on our own," as Vaucher speaks Italian fluently ; and as our soldier chauffeur knew the road well, there was not much fear of our getting lost.

We decided that it was advisable for form's sake to call on the Divisional General, and ask for his permission to pass through the lines. With some little difficulty we succeeded in discovering his Headquarters. These were, we learned, on the railway, close to the Rubbia-Savogna Station, on the Trieste-Gorizia line.

It turned out to be about the last place where one would have expected to unearth a General. The station itself was in ruins, and presented a pathetically forlorn appearance, with posters and time-tables hanging in tatters from the walls ; no train had passed here for very many months.

We left the car on the permanent way alongside the platform, and picked our way along the track through the twisted and displaced rails to the signalman's " cabin," which had been converted into the Headquarters *pro tem.*

It was as unconventional and warlike as could well be imagined, and as a subject for a picture would have delighted a military painter.

The General was a well set up, good-looking man of middle age, and quite the most unassuming officer of his rank I have ever met. After carefully examining our military permits to come there, he received us with the utmost cordiality. He spoke French fluently, and was apparently much interested in our work as war correspondents.

There was no difficulty, he said, about our going to San Martino, but we did so at our own risk, as it was his duty to warn us that it was still being constantly shelled ; in fact, he added, the whole neighbourhood was under fire, and he pointed out a gaping hole a few yards away where a shell had burst only an hour before our arrival, and had blown a small hut to atoms.

The railway station was being continually bombarded, and he was sorry to say that he had lost a good many of his staff here.

No strategic object whatever was attained by this promiscuous shelling ; the only thing it did was to get on the men's nerves and make them fidgetty.

" They want to be up and doing instead of waiting about here when their comrades have gone on ahead."

We had quite a long talk with him, and gathered some interesting details of the fighting that had taken place round here. He was most enthusiastic about the *moral* of his troops, that no fatigue or pain can quell.

The only difficulty the officers experienced was in getting them to advance with caution. "Ils deviennent des tigrés une fois lancés ; c'est difficile de les retenir."

As we bade him adieu, he asked us as a personal favour not to mention him in any article we might write, adding modestly : "Je ne suis qu'un soldat de l'Italie, et ne désire pas de réclame."

There was a turning off the main road beyond Sdraussina that passed under the railway embankment, and then went up to San Martino del Carso.

Here there was an animated scene of military activity. A battalion of infantry was bivouacing, and up the side of the hill, which was one of the slopes of Monte San Michele, there was a big camp with tents arranged in careful alignment. I mention this latter fact as it was an unusual spectacle to see an encampment so well "pitched."

Both the bivouac and the tents were quite protected from shell-fire by the brow of the hill, but they would have made an easy target had the Austrians had any aeroplanes here ; doubtless, though, all precautions had been taken by the Italian Commander in the event of this.

Over the crest of the hill the scene changed as though by magic, and all sign of military movement disappeared.

The desolate waste of the Carso faced us, and we were in the zone of death and desolation. The road was absolutely without a vestige of "cover" ; it was but a track across the rocky ground, and now wound over a series of low, undulating ridges, on which one could trace the battered remains of trenches.

Huge shell-craters were visible everywhere, and the road itself was so freshly damaged in places that I involuntarily recalled what the General had told us, and wondered whether we should get back safely.

The country was so open and uninteresting that one could see all that there was to see for several miles ahead ; it was therefore certain no scenic surprises were awaiting you.

Meanwhile shells were bursting with unpleasant persistency round about the road ; it was not what one could term an inviting prospect and recalled an incident that had occurred a few days previously on this very road.

There was a good deal of firing going on as usual, and the chauffeur of an officer's car suddenly lost his nerve and became completely paralysed with fear, not an altogether unusual case, I believe.

It was a very awkward situation, as the officer knew nothing about driving, so he was obliged to sit still for over an hour, when, fortunately for him, a motor lorry came along, and he was extricated from his predicament.

It seemed to me to be very purposeless going on further, since there was absolutely nothing to sketch and still less to write about. Since, however, we could not be far from our destination now, I thought it best to say nothing.

But where was the village ? I knew by what we had been told that we must be close to it by now ; yet there was no trace of habitation anywhere.

The chauffeur suddenly turned round and, pointing to what appeared to be a rugged slope just ahead, said quietly, " Ecco San Martino del Carso."

I am hardened to the sight of ruins by now after more than two years at the war, but I must admit I had a bit of a shock when I realized that this long, low line of shapeless, dust-covered rubble actually

bore a name, and that this was the place we had risked coming out to see.

No earthquake could have more effectually wiped out this village than have the combined Italian and Austrian batteries.

We drove up the slope to what had been the commencement of the houses. To our surprise a motor lorry was drawn up under the shelter of a bit of wall ; two men were with it. What was their object in being there one could not perceive, as there was no other sign of life around.

We left the car here, and I went for a stroll round with my sketch book, whilst Vaucher took his camera and went off by himself to find a subject worth a photograph.

The Austrian trenches commenced in amongst the ruins : they were typical of the Carso ; only a couple of feet or so in depth, and actually hewn out of the solid rock, with a low wall of stones in front as a breastwork.

So roughly were they made that it was positively tiring to walk along them even a short distance. To have passed any time in them under fire with splinters of rock flying about must have been a terrible ordeal, especially at night.

San Martino was certainly the reverse of interesting, and I was hoping my comrade would soon return so that we could get away, when the distant boom of a gun was heard, followed by the ominous wail of a big shell approaching.

The two soldiers and our chauffeur, who were chatting together, made a dash for cover underneath the lorry ; whilst I, with a sudden impulse I cannot explain, flung myself face downwards on the ground, as there was no time to make for the shelter of the trench.

The shell exploded sufficiently near to make one very uncomfortable, but fortunately without doing

us any harm. A couple more quickly followed, but we could see that the gunners had not yet got the range, so there was nothing to worry about for the moment.

Vaucher soon returned, having had a futile walk ; so we made up for it all by taking snapshots of ourselves under fire, a somewhat idiotic procedure.

As we drove back to Udine, we were agreed that, considering how little there had been to see, *le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle*, or rather *ne valait pas le petrole*, to bring the saying up to date.

A very pleasant little episode a few days later made a welcome interlude to our warlike energies. The Director of the Censorship, Colonel Barbarich, received his full colonelcy, and to celebrate the event the correspondents invited him and his brother officers to a fish déjeuner at Grado, the little quondam Austrian watering place on the Adriatic.

We made a " day's outing " of it ; several of the younger men starting off early so as to have a bathe in the sea before lunch.

It was glorious weather, and we had a " top hole " time. It all went off without a hitch ; the déjeuner was excellent ; I don't think I ever tasted finer fish anywhere ; the wine could not have been better, and, of course, we had several eloquent speeches to wind up with.

There was just that little " Human " touch about the whole thing that helped to still further accentuate the *camaraderie* of the Censorship, and the good fellowship existing between its officers and the correspondents.

Grado, though at first sight not much damaged since our visit on the previous year, had suffered very considerably from the visits of Austrian aircraft. They were still constantly coming over, in spite of the apparently adequate defences, and many women and children had been killed and many more houses demolished.

There was a curious sight in the dining room of the hotel where we gave the lunch. The proprietor had built a veritable " funk-hole " in a corner of the room. It was constructed with solid timber, and covered in with sand-bags in the most approved style.

Inside were a table, chairs, large bed, lamp, food, drink, etc. ; in fact, everything requisite in case a lengthy occupation was necessary ; and there the proprietor and his wife and children would take refuge whenever the enemy was signalled.

After lunch we were invited to make a trip in one of the new type of submarine chasers, which are said to be the fastest boats afloat anywhere, and went for an hour's run at terrific speed in the direction of Trieste ; in fact, had it not been for a bit of a sea fog hanging about we should have actually been well in sight of it. Perhaps it was fortunate for us there was this fog on the water.

Things were a bit quiet in Udine now. Stirring incidents do not occur every week, and the usual period of comparative inactivity had come round again whilst further operations were in process of development ; there was but little inducement, therefore, to spend money on petrol just for the sake of verifying what one knew was happening up at the lines.

But I had plenty to occupy me in my studio, working on the numerous sketches the recent doings had provided me with, till something worth going away for turned up again.

In the interim an event of historic importance occurred.

CHAPTER XX

DECLARATION of war between Italy and Germany—Effect of declaration at Udine —Interesting incident—General Cadorna consents to give me a sitting for a sketch—The curious conditions—Methodic and business-like —Punctuality and precision—A reminder of old days—I am received by the Generalissimo— His simple, unaffected manner—Unconventional chat—"That will please them in England" My Gorizia sketch book—The General a capital model—"Hard as nails"—The sketch finished —Rumour busy again—A visit to Monfalcone— One of the General's Aides-de-camp—Start at unearthly hour—Distance to Monfalcone—Arctic conditions—"In time for lunch"—Town life and war—Austrian hour for opening fire—Monfalcone—Deserted aspect—The damage by bombardment—The guns silent for the moment— The ghost of a town—"That's only one of our own guns"—A walk to the shipbuilding yards —The communication trench—The bank of the canal—The pontoon bridge—The immense red structure—The deserted shipbuilding establishment—Fantastic forms—Vessels in course of construction—A strange blight—The hull of the 20,000 ton liner—The gloomy interior—The view of the Carso and Trieste through a port-hole—Of soul stirring interest—Hill No. 144— The "daily strafe"—"Just in time"—Back to Udine "in time for lunch"—Return to the Carso—Attack on the Austrian positions at

Veliki Hribach—New difficulties—Dense forest—Impenetrable cover—Formidable lines of trenches captured—Fighting for position at Nova Vas—Dramatic ending—Weather breaking up—Operations on a big scale perforce suspended—Return London await events.

CHAPTER XX

ON the 28th August, 1916, Italy declared war on Germany. The declaration had, however, been so long anticipated that, so far as one was in a position to judge, it made little or no difference in the already existing state of affairs ; since the two nations had to all intents and purposes been fighting against each other for months, and at Udine, at any rate, it scarcely aroused any comment outside the Press.

However, it settled any doubts that might have existed on the subject, and henceforth the Italians and the Huns were officially justified in killing each other whenever they got the chance.

Curiously enough, it was through General Cadorna himself that I learned that war had been declared. It was under somewhat interesting circumstances, which I will relate.

I had always desired to make a sketch of the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army, and with this idea had asked Colonel Barbarich at the Censorship if he would try and arrange it for me.

He willingly agreed, but a few days after he told me that he had done the best he could for me, but that the General had said that for the moment he was far too occupied, but perhaps he would accede to my desire a little later. I must therefore have patience.

This looked like a polite way of putting me off, and I accepted it as such.

Gorizia and other subjects engaged my attention, and I had forgotten the incident when, to my surprise, one day Colonel Barbarich came up to me and said that if I still wished to make the sketch of the General, His Excellency would be pleased to receive

me on the following Monday morning at eleven o'clock precisely, and would give me a sitting of exactly half-an-hour.

"But," added Colonel Barbarich, "you must clearly understand it is only half-an-hour, and also that the General will not talk to you as he will not be interviewed."

The "following Monday" was nearly a week ahead, so this was methodic and businesslike indeed.

Of course, in spite of all the conditions attaching to the sitting, I was delighted to find that my request had not been overlooked, so I replied jocularly to the Colonel that failing an earthquake or the ill-timed intervention of an Austrian shrapnel, I would certainly make it my duty to keep the appointment.

Well, the auspicious day arrived in due course, and so did I in good time at the Censorship to meet Colonel Barbarich, who was to take me on to the General, whose quarters were in a palace originally intended for the Prefect of Udine, only a short distance away.

With the knowledge of the punctuality and precision of the General, at l'heure militaire, that is to say, as the clock was striking eleven, we made our way up the grand staircase to the first floor where the General resided and had his offices.

In a large anti-chamber, with a big model of the Isonzo Front occupying the whole of the centre, we were received by an aide-de-camp, who evidently expected us exactly at that moment. Colonel Barbarich briefly introduced me, then to my surprise left at once.

The Aide-de-camp took my card into an adjoining apartment, and returning immediately, said that His Excellency General Cadorna was waiting for me, and ushered me in.

Up till then nothing could have been more matter-of-fact and businesslike. It reminded me of the old

A grey-haired officer of medium height, whom I immediately recognised as the Generalissimo, was reading an official document

days when I sought journalistic interviews with city magnates. But the business-like impression vanished as soon as I was inside the door.

I found myself in a very large room, well but scantily furnished. Standing by a table, which was covered with maps, a grey-haired officer of medium height, whom I immediately recognised as the Generalissimo, was reading an official document.

He came forward and cordially shook hands with me in the most informal way. I began to thank him for his courtesy in receiving me, and was apologising for not being able to speak Italian, when he cut me short, saying with a laugh :

" I speak but very leetle English," but " " Peut-être vous parlez Français." On my telling him I did he exclaimed genially :

" A la bonheur, then we will speak in French. Now what do you want me to do ? I am at your service."

His simple and unaffected manner put me at once at my ease and made me instantly feel that this was going to be a " sympathetic " interview, and not a quasi official reception.

I must mention that I had asked Colonel Barbarich to explain that I did not want to worry the General, but would be quite content if I were permitted to make a few jottings in my sketch book of him at work and some details of his surroundings. This, as I have explained, was granted, but with the curious proviso that I was not to talk whilst I was there.

It came, therefore, as a very pleasant surprise to find myself received in this amicable fashion, and the ice being thus broken, I said, I should like to sketch him reading a document, as I found him on entering the room. He willingly acquiesced, and I at once started my drawing as there was no time to lose.

With the recollection of the stipulation that I was not to open my mouth during the sitting, and that I was only allowed half-an-hour I went on working rapidly and in silence.

But I soon found that the General was not inclined to be taciturn, and in a few moments we were chatting in the most unconventional manner as if we were old friends. As a matter of fact, I shrewdly suspected him of interviewing me.

When he learned how long I had been on the Italian Front he was much interested, and was immediately anxious to know what I thought of his soldiers. Were they not splendid ? He put the question with all the enthusiasm and affection of a father who is proud of his children.

As may be imagined, I had no difficulty in convincing him that I have a whole-hearted admiration for the Italian Army after what I had seen of its wonderful doings at Gorizia and elsewhere.

It was then that he gave me the news of the declaration of war between Italy and Germany ; the morning papers had not published it in the early editions.

" That will please them in England," he remarked with a laugh. I agreed with him that it would, although it had long been expected.

The mention of England reminded me that he had just returned from the war conference in London, so I asked if he had ever been there before.

" Yes," he replied with a humorous twinkle in his eye, " forty years ago ; but I do not remember much of it ; although my father was ambassador to England I only lived with him in London for a short while. It is, of course, much changed since then."

Whilst thus chatting I was working with feverish haste at my sketch.

I now noticed he was getting a bit impatient at

keeping the same position, so I suggested a few moments rest. He came over to see how I had got on, and asked if he might look through my sketch book.

It happened to be the one I had used at Gorizia, and the sketches I had made that day pleased him very much.

"You were fortunate, you were able to see something; I never see anything," he remarked quite pathetically.

I felt there was no time to lose if I wanted to get finished in the half-hour, so hinted at his resuming the pose for a few minutes longer. He did so at once, and I ventured to tell him in a joking way that he would make a capital model.

"Well, I am as active now as I ever was," he replied, taking me seriously, "and I can ride and walk as well now as I could when I was a young man."

This I could well believe, because he looks as "hard as nails," and chock full of energy and determination, as the Austrian generals have discovered to their undoing.

I had now completed my rough sketch sufficiently to be able to finish it in the studio.

The General expressed his gratification at my having done it so rapidly, so I suggested another ten minutes some other day to put the finishing touches.

"Come whenever you like, I shall always be pleased to see you," replied His Excellency genially.

Although, as I have said, there was no outward evidence of the declaration of war making any difference in the conduct of the campaign, rumours soon began to be persistently busy again, and it became pretty evident that something big was going to happen on the Carso before the weather broke up and the autumn rains set in and put a stop to active operations for some time.

There had been a good deal of talk of operations pending in the vicinity of Monfalcone, so I got permission to accompany a Staff Officer who was going there one morning. I had always wanted to see the place and its much talked-of shipbuilding yards, but curiously enough this was the first opportunity I had had of going there.

My companion was one of General Cadorna's aides-de-camp, so we went in one of the big cars belonging to Headquarters. We started at the usual unearthly hour to which one had become accustomed and which, as I have pointed out, is delightful in the summer, but is not quite so fascinating on a raw autumn morning before sunrise.

I was very disappointed when I learned that we should probably be back in Udine " in time for lunch " unless something untoward occurred to force us to stay away longer ; as I had been looking forward to an extended run that would last the whole day, but as I was practically a guest on this occasion I could say nothing. My companion, like so many Italian officers, spoke French fluently, and turned out to be a very interesting fellow ; and as he had been stationed for some time at Monfalcone before going on the Staff, he knew the district we were making for as well as it was possible to know it.

The distance from Udine to Monfalcone is, roughly, the same as from London to Brighton, and we went via Palmanova, Cervignano, and Ronchi.

It was a bitterly cold morning, with an unmistakable nip of frost in the air, so although I was muffled up to my ears I was gradually getting frozen, and my eyes were running like taps. It may be imagined, therefore, how I was envying my companion his big fur-lined coat.

I had arrived at the Front in the hottest time of the year, so had taken no precautions against Arctic

conditions. Motoring in Northern Italy in an open car during the winter months must be a very trying ordeal indeed, if what I experienced that morning was any criterion of it.

As we sped along I asked the Aide-de-camp if there was any particular reason for his starting off so early, and if it was absolutely necessary for us to be back " in time for lunch." To my mind the very thought of it took the interest off the trip and brought it down to the level of an ordinary pleasure jaunt, which was to me particularly nauseating.

After all these months at the Front I have not yet been able to accustom myself to the combination of everyday town life and war, and I am afraid shall never be able to. Doubtless it is a result of old time experiences.

My companion treated my query somewhat lightly. " You will be able to see all there is to see in and round Monfalcone in three hours," he replied," so what is the use therefore of staying longer ? Moreover," he added seriously, " the Austrian batteries have made a practice of opening fire every morning at about eleven o'clock, and usually continue for some hours, so there is the risk of not being able to come away when one wants to."

There was, of course, no reply possible, and the more especially as I am not exactly a glutton for high explosives, as will have been remarked.

Monfalcone is a nice bright little town, typically Austrian, and before the war must have been a very busy commercial centre.

When I was there it was absolutely deserted, with the exception of a few soldiers stationed there. The shops were all closed, grass was growing in the streets, and it presented the usual desolate appearance of a place continually under the menace of bombardment.

The damage done to it up till then was really

unimportant considering the reports that had been spread as to its destruction. Many houses had been demolished, as was to be expected, but I was surprised to find how relatively undamaged it appeared after the months of daily gun-fire to which it had been subjected.

We left the car in a convenient courtyard where it was under cover, and made our way to the Headquarters of the Divisional Commandant, where, as a matter of etiquette I had to leave my card.

For the moment the guns were silent, and there was a strange quietude in the streets that struck me as being different to anything I had noticed anywhere else, except perhaps in Rheims during the bombardment when there was an occasional lull.

One had the feeling that at any moment something awful might happen. Even the soldiers one met seemed to me to have a subdued air, and the drawn expression which is brought about by constant strain on the nerves.

Instinctively one walked where one's footsteps made the least noise, in order to be able to hear in good time the screech of an approaching shell.

It had turned out a lovely day, and in the brilliant sunshine Monfalcone should have been a bright and cheerful place, instead of which it was but the ghost of a town with the shadow of death continually overhanging it.

The peaceful stillness was not to be of long duration. Silence for any length of time had been unknown in Monfalcone for many a long day.

Whilst we were having a talk with the officers at Headquarters there was a loud detonation, apparently just outside the building. To my annoyance I could not restrain an involuntary start, as it was totally unexpected.

"That's only one of our guns," remarked, with a smile, a Major with whom I was chatting, and who

had noticed the jump I made. "The Austrians won't commence for another couple of hours at least," he added.

My companion and I then started off to walk down to the shipbuilding yard, about a mile and a half from the town, and which was, of course, the principal sight of the place.

One had not gone far when one had some idea how exposed was the position of Monfalcone. A deep communication trench commenced in the main street and continued alongside the road the whole way down to the port—no one was allowed to walk outside it.

The object of this was to prevent any movement being seen from the Austrian batteries, which were only a comparatively short distance away, though it must have been no secret to them what was going on in Monfalcone.

The Italian guns were now getting busy, and the noise was deafening, but still there was no response from the enemy; it was evidently true that he worked to time, and it was not yet eleven o'clock.

Although only a mile and a half, the walk seemed longer because one could see nothing on either side, the walls of the trench being quite six feet high; but at last we came out on the bank of what looked like a broad canal. This is part of a waterway constructed to connect up the port with the railway.

The communication trench now took the form of a sunken pathway winding along the bank under the trees, and was quite picturesque in places.

At last we reached the end, and facing us was the Adriatic as calm as a lake, and away on the horizon one could see the hills that guard Trieste.

We crossed the mouth of the canal by a pontoon bridge, which I believe had been abandoned by the Austrians when they evacuated Monfalcone at the beginning of the war.

A short distance ahead, towering above a conglomeration of long sheds on the low-lying ground, was an immense red structure, the outlines of which recalled something familiar. As one got nearer one saw that it was the unfinished steel hull of a gigantic ocean liner, and that the red colouring was caused by the accumulation of rust from long exposure.

We soon reached the entrance to a vast shipbuilding establishment. There were no bolts or bars to prevent our walking in.

The whole place was deserted, and all around us was a spectacle of ruin and desolation that was more impressive than actual havoc caused by bombardment.

In the immense workshops the machinery was rotting away; on the benches lay the tools of workmen; strange metal forms, portions of the framework of big ships lay here and there on the sodden ground like huge red skeletons of antediluvian animals.

Many vessels had been in the course of construction, mostly for the Mercantile fleet of Austria, though there were some destroyers and war-craft on the stocks as well. Rust, of a weird intensity of colour. I had never seen before, was over everything like a strange blight.

Alongside the sheds was the hull of the big liner one had seen in the distance. A 20,000 ton boat, I was told, which was being built for the Austrian Lloyd Line.

The wooden slipway and the cradle supports had caught fire and had been destroyed, and this I was told had caused the keel to break, so that the hull was now but a derelict mass of steelwork which could never be floated.

Had it not been for the satisfaction one felt in gazing on the ruins of a prospective addition to the Mercantile Navy of the enemy, this leviathan of

To advance through this jungle called for all the cool, disciplined courage of the Italian soldier (*see page* 293)

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wasted industry and material would have appeared quite tragic.

The companion-way used by the workmen was still in position, so we clambered up into the gloomy interior and had a walk round, our footsteps echoing mournfully along the cavernous emptiness of the decks.

Through a port-hole we got a very fine view of the Carso and the Italian and Austrian positions in between Monfalcone and Duino; whilst in the distance, some fifteen miles away, one could distinctly see with the glasses the white buildings of Trieste, so near and yet so far!

There was evidently a big fight going on at that moment in the direction of a hill not far away from Monfalcone, known as No. 144, which had been frequently referred to in the *communiqués*, and you could see the bursting shells and hear the booming of the guns.

It was a panorama of soul-stirring interest, and one could have spent hours gazing on it; but time was flying and we had to be thinking of returning.

I had not attached much credence to the statement that the Austrians had established a sort of precedent as to time with regard to opening fire every day, but out of curiosity I glanced at my watch as we started back.

It may have been a mere coincidence, but it was just on eleven o'clock. Beyond, however, the dull booming of the guns in the direction of Hill No. 144, there was no sign yet of artillery activity anywhere near Monfalcone.

We had crossed the pontoon bridge and were making our way along the canal bank when there was the report of a gun not very far away in the enemy's lines, and the screech of a shell passing over our heads proved beyond a doubt that the "Daily Strafe" was about to commence.

The shell burst on the outskirts of the town and in the direction in which we were going. My companion, who was walking on ahead, called out jocularly that we should be " just in time."

From now the firing increased every minute, and it seemed to me that the sole objective of the Austrian gunners was the place where we had left our car.

We met several groups of soldiers as we went along, and I noticed that if a shell happened to be coming over just then, the majority of the men always stopped and crouched down against the protecting wall of the trench.

This prompted my asking my companion what he considered to be the best thing to do when under fire. " Take no notice of it," was his laconic reply.

In Monfalcone the streets were nearly deserted, though whether in consequence of the shelling commencing or some other cause, I could not tell ; anyhow, as there was nothing further to see that day we returned to Udine " in time for lunch."

A couple of days later I was back again on the Carso. A big attack on the Austrian positions at Veliki Hribach, near Doberdo, having suddenly developed.

Difficulties had to be surmounted here which were totally different to any previously encountered, as the offensive was made through close-growing woodland.

An important sector of the Carso district to the north of Trieste consists of wooded country, and directly bars the Italian advance in that region. The ground in question was artificially planted by the Austrian Government some years ago under a scheme to reclaim the Carso and convert it into forest tracts.

Plantations of fir trees were laid out over a large area, and these are now grown into the woods, which present a very serious obstacle to the Italians.

Sheltered by the almost impenetrable cover which the dense growth of immature trees offers, the Austrians had constructed Torres-Vedras-like series of fortified positions among the trees along the ridges that intersect the district. In the Veliki Hribach stretch of woods alone no fewer than eleven formidable lines of trenches have been captured.

The trees are of too young growth to stop bullets; and hidden in their trenches the Austrians could sweep the approaches at ground level, lying low behind abattis and a mass of wire entanglements.

The whole aspect of the country here reminded me strangely of parts of the West Australian "bush," with, of course, the exception that these are fir trees.

Still, there was so much resemblance that it would have been as easy to lose oneself here in the dense growth as it is in the "bush."

To advance through this jungle called for all the cool disciplined courage of the Italian soldier. There was no opportunity for a wild headlong assault on the Austrian trenches; they had to be virtually "stalked," as the cover afforded by the saplings was so illusory as to give practically no protection at all.

The wood in which I made my sketch had been "blazed" beforehand by a handful of the most daring spirits among the men; not by "barking" the trees, which would have taken too long, but by means of whitened stones dropped on the ground at intervals to indicate the direction the troops were to follow.

The capture of the Veliki Hribach position proved that the Italian soldier can be relied on under any circumstances, however trying.

The day following the offensive developed in the direction of Nova Vas, about a mile and a half east of Doberdo, on the heights of San Grado di Merna, and near Lokvica, with continued success for the Italians.

The fighting for the position at Nova Vas on September 15th in particular ended in so dramatic a fashion that it will long be remembered by all who witnessed it.

After a furious preparatory bombardment for hours by the Italian heavy guns, to which the Austrians replied vigorously, there was a sudden cessation of the Italian fire.

The crisis had come : the infantry were to attack. But while waiting word from elsewhere, there was a brief pause.

Next, suddenly, to the general amazement, within six minutes of the guns ceasing, one saw hundreds of men abandoning the Austrian front trenches. They held up their hands and waved handkerchiefs wildly in token of surrender.

Out they poured, like driven rats stampeded by terriers from a barn. They came racing across the stretch of " No man's land " between the opposing trenches, straight for the Italians, taking their chance amidst the Austrian shells, still falling briskly.

The spectacular effect of the grey-coated figures, without arms or accoutrements, running towards them, hands up, and frantically shouting " Kamerad ! Kamerad ! " was startlingly dramatic.

The Italian soldiers were so amazed at the sight that, regardless of the risk of exposing themselves, they showed themselves over their own parapets and stood gazing at what was taking place.

In all, 2,117 Austrian prisoners mere made that day, including 71 officers.

Torrential rain set in during the night, and the captured trenches were found to be in so complete a state of ruin and afforded so little shelter that the troops were brought back to their original positions.

After this offensive the weather showed unmistakable signs of breaking up ; bitterly cold winds with heavy rains every day put a stop to all military

movements of any importance. Although it is certain that no weather, however bad, will entirely arrest the activity of General Cadorna for even 24 hours, it was apparent, however, that the resumption of operations on anything like a big scale would have to be suspended *bon gré mal gré* till the early spring.

To spend the winter in Udine, therefore, presented no particular attraction for me, so I decided to return to London and there await events, in readiness to go back if necessary at a moment's notice.

It was certainly with regret that I was leaving the Italian Front, for I had spent many glorious days with King Victor Emmanuel's heroic soldiers, but my regret was softened by the thought that I should soon be returning to assist at the final victory.

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